John McNaughton presents:

CARNYKILL



Illustrated by Tony Byrnes

Adapted from the novel by Robert Edmond Alter


CARNY
KILL

In 1987, I was sent a book, by an old friend, to consider as a film adaptation. The title of the book was, “Carny Kill” by Robert Edmond Alter. I was certainly intrigued, having worked as a carny for The Royal American Shows in 1975, then North America’s largest traveling carnival. I quickly read the novel, which I loved, and we entered into an option deal with a literary agent who represented the book. The author was deceased. The novel was published in 1966 and tells the story of Thax, an existential drifter, who washes up at a downmarket amusement park called Neverland, located in the Florida tidelands along the Gulf Coast.

I adapted the book into a screenplay and submitted it to my agent who sent it out into the marketplace but there was little interest at that time and the project found no backers. Eventually it was shelved and I moved on to other projects and Carny Kill would lie dormant for many years.

The first big word my father taught me was “perseverance.” When I asked what it meant he said, “it means, stick-to-it-iv-ness.” When you start something it behooves you to stick with it until you finish, “behooves” being another favorite word of his. So I did.

Fast forward to 2016 when I began to discuss the project with my former college roommate, Tony Byrnes. Tony and I went to art school together at the University of Illinois and remained friends through the years. Although our lives took different paths we stayed in touch. As I look through my emails for Carny Kill, I see that I first sent Tony the script on Jan 23, 2016.

Tony started sending sketches and various reference images soon after reading the script and we continued in this manner where he would send artwork and I would send back comments, going back and forth, month after month, refining the look, the method of rendering, developing the characters, etc. until March of 2020 when Tony sent the first actual renderings of the opening scenes.

March 2020 was the beginning of the pandemic which locked us both down in our respective homes, requiring that all work be done remotely. In many ways the pandemic worked to our advantage, allowing us the time and isolation to buckle down and crank out the scenes in a very meticulous and labor intensive manner.

As the work progressed it became clear that what we were creating was not so much a book as a work of art. As former art students this made perfect sense.

It’s been a long road from art school roommates in 1969 until the completion of Carny Kill in it’s present form and I wish to thank Elke Titus for sending me the book, Tony Byrnes for his stunning illustrations and my father for teaching me the meaning of perseverance.



John McNaughton


Thax, an existential drifter, thumbs a ride.


An old Pontiac Chieftain...


...rolls through the Florida tidelands.


The car stops.
Thax gets in.

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An old timer drives the car.


Thax stares into the distance.

An amusement park appears like an apparition.




This looks like it.


That the carnival place? That Dreamland?


Yeah. You can just drop me by the gate.

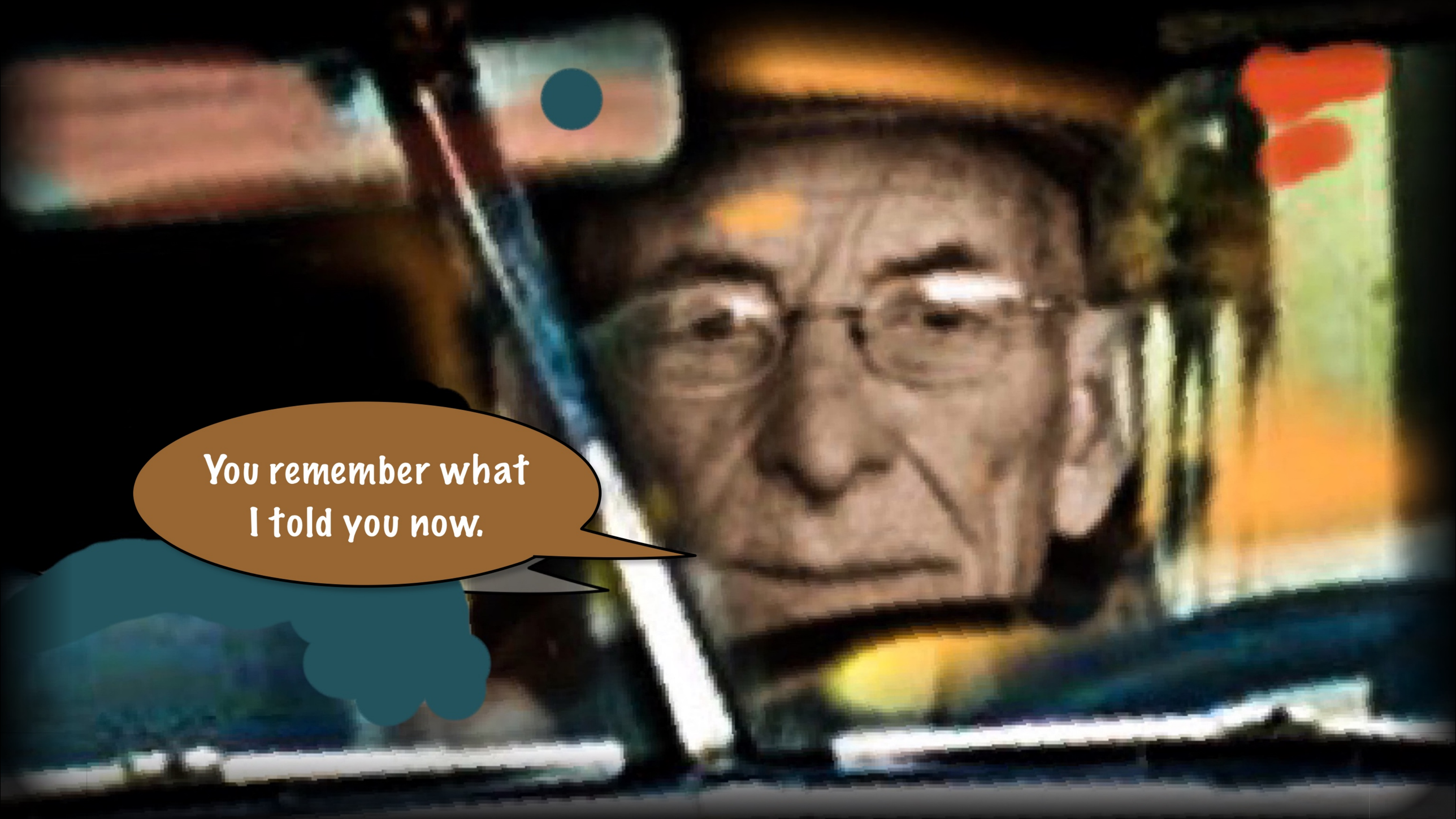

They arrive at Dreamland.
Dreamland
ENTRANCE


The Pontiac pulls up to the gate.



Thax gets out and grabs his stuff.


Well, thanks for the ride.


You remember what
I told you now.


I'll remember.

He walks to the gate.




CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
WORLD WAX
Dreamland
SPOT
PALACE of ILLUSION
INTERNATIONAL
WORLDS STRANGEST PEOPLE
12 BIG ACTS



Thax lugs his stuff down the midway.



He passes a flashy thrill ride. Riders scream, suspended upside down in mid air.



Loose change drops from their pockets and rains on the midway.

A ride jockey scoops up the loot.



Thax eyeballs the Ride Jockey, wise to his game.



Then he hears a voice from his past.



He turns toward the adenoidal voice of Bill Duff.

Bill Duff introduces the voluptuous Billie Peeler to a crowd of marks gathered around his bally platform.




Perform a sophisticated Eastern courtship dance...


CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
...seldom seen outside the Casbah of old Baghdad.
12 BIG ACTS
SPOT


CASTLE
The forgotten mating dance of the Hindu Love Goddess dating back to primitive times.


CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
Smuggled out of old Lahore...
PALACE of
WORLDS STRANGEST PEOPLE
12 BIG ACTS


...under threat of death from
the killer priests of Kali.



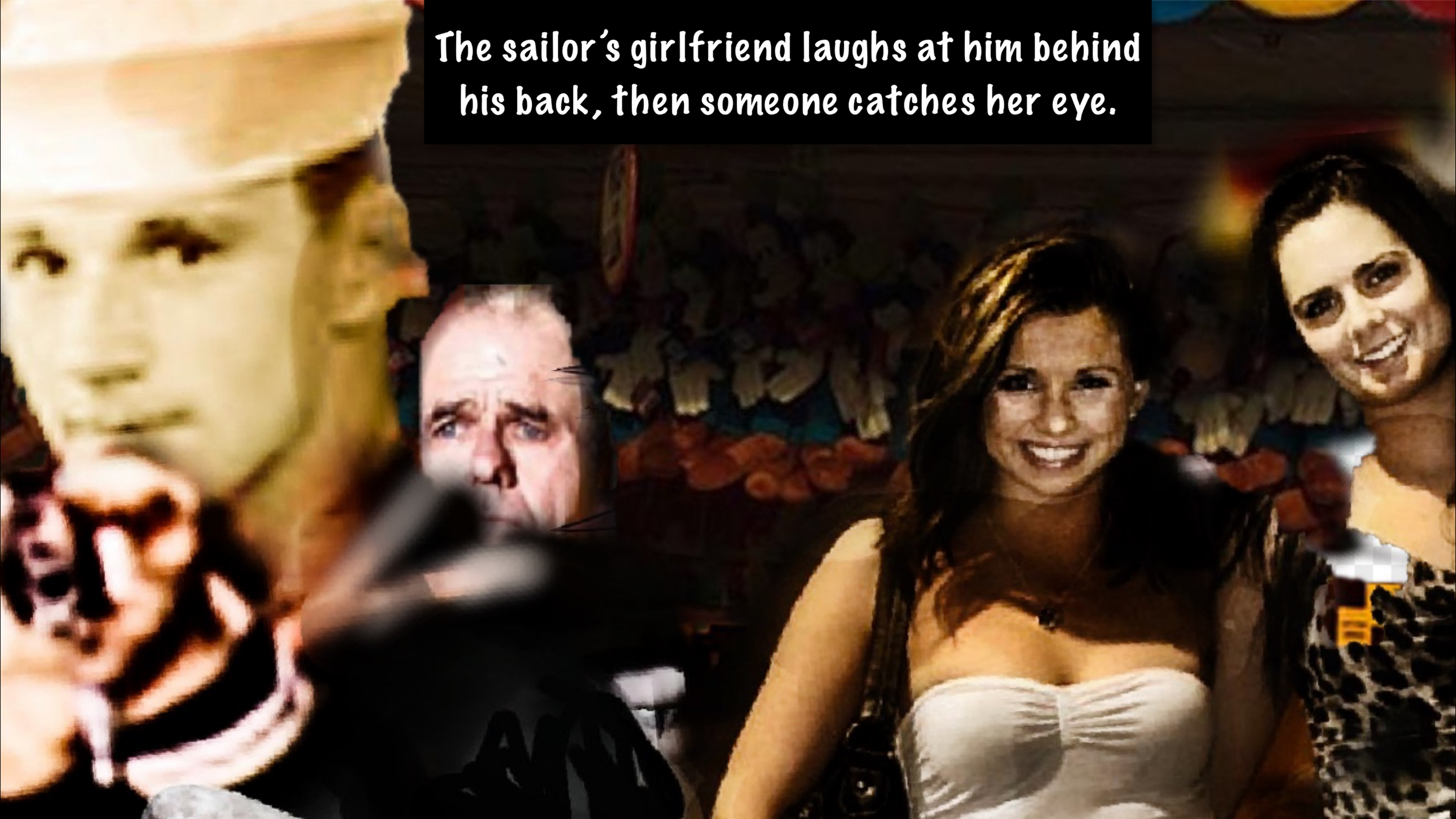
Duff spots Thax.


Thax flips Duff the bird.
POW

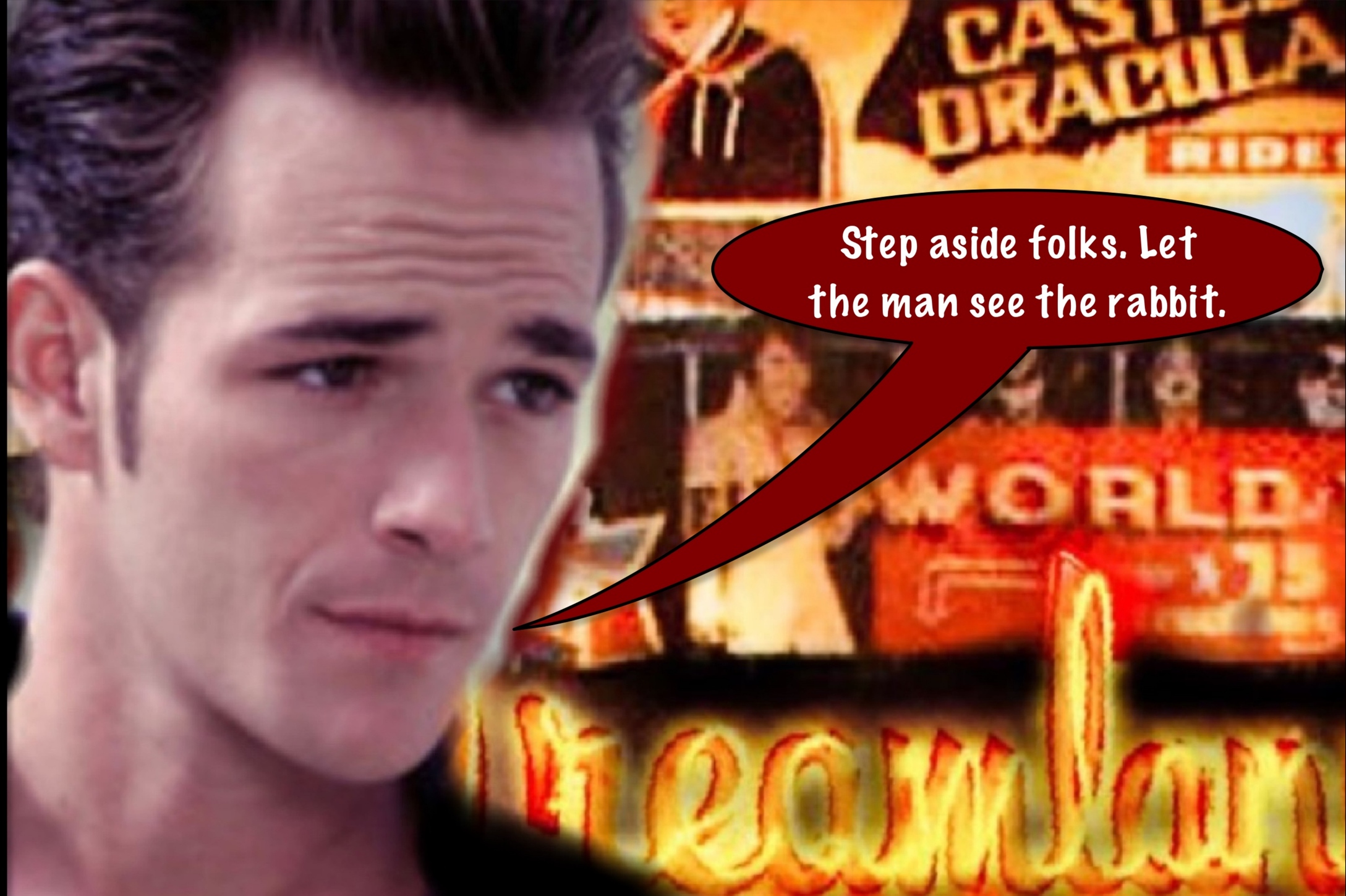


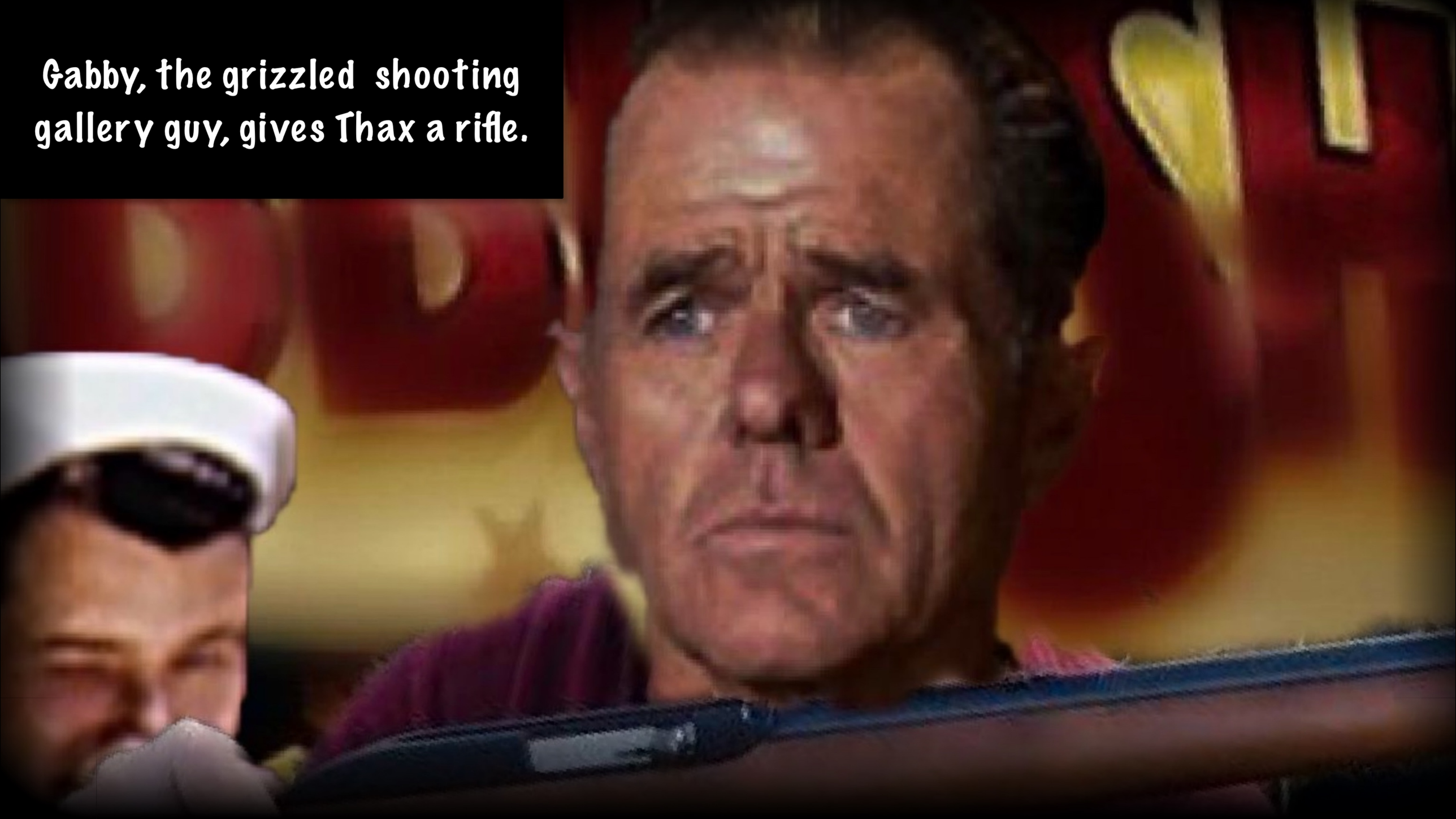
A sailor fires a rifle at a row of steel rabbits. He curses as he misses.

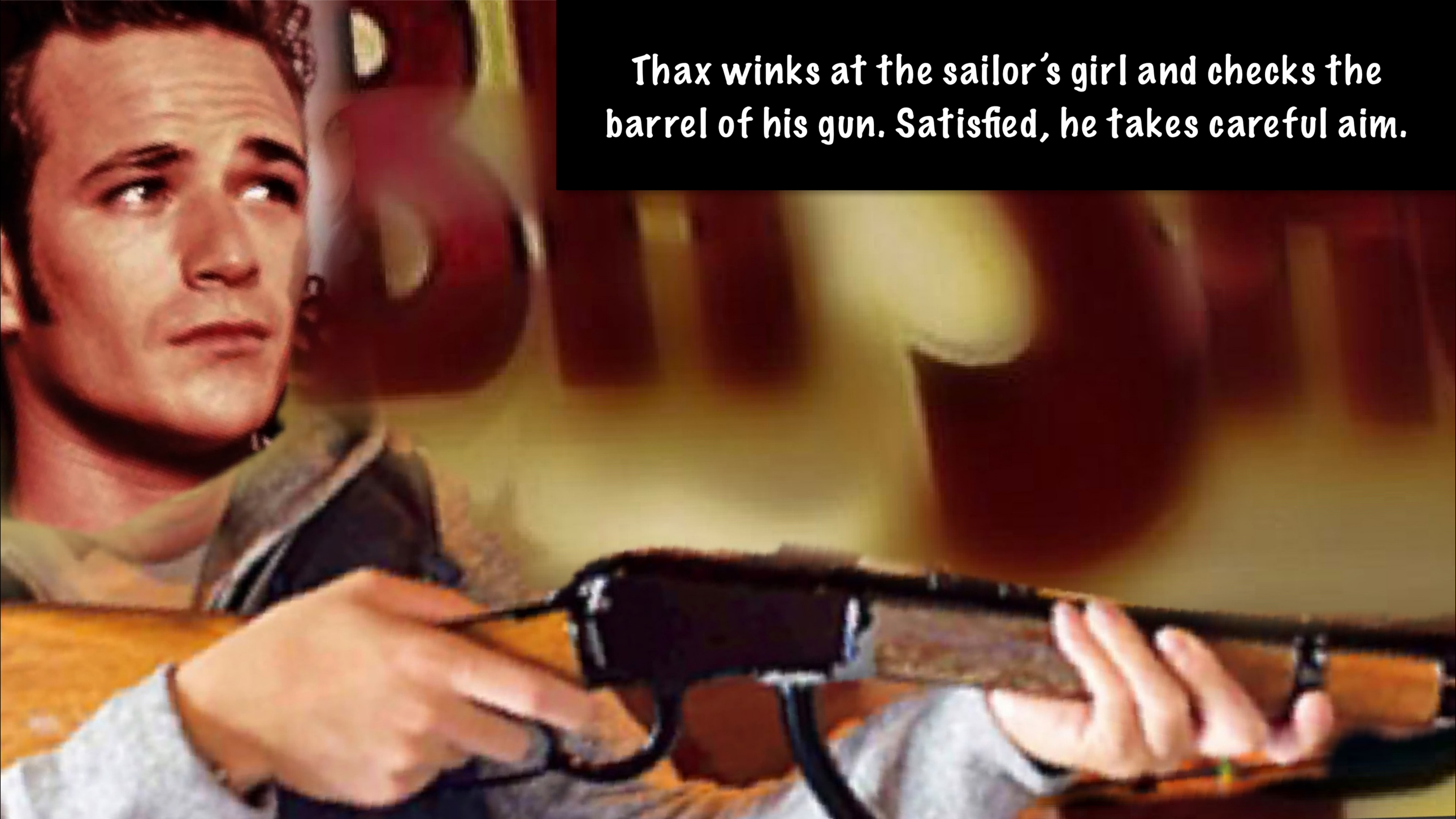

Doink
Doink
Doink


The sailor's girlfriend laughs at him behind his back, then someone catches her eye.

It's Thax. He smiles at the sailor's girl and steps up to the counter.




Gabby, the grizzled shooting gallery guy, gives Thax a rifle.


Thax winks at the sailor's girl and checks the barrel of his gun. Satisfied, he takes careful aim.


Flopsy...
Mopsy...
...and there goes Cottontail!
Ding!
Ding!
Ding!

Thax runs out of ammo and hands the rifle back to Gabby.




Something wrong?


No beef. I need a job.


You carny?


Yeah.


Spiel?

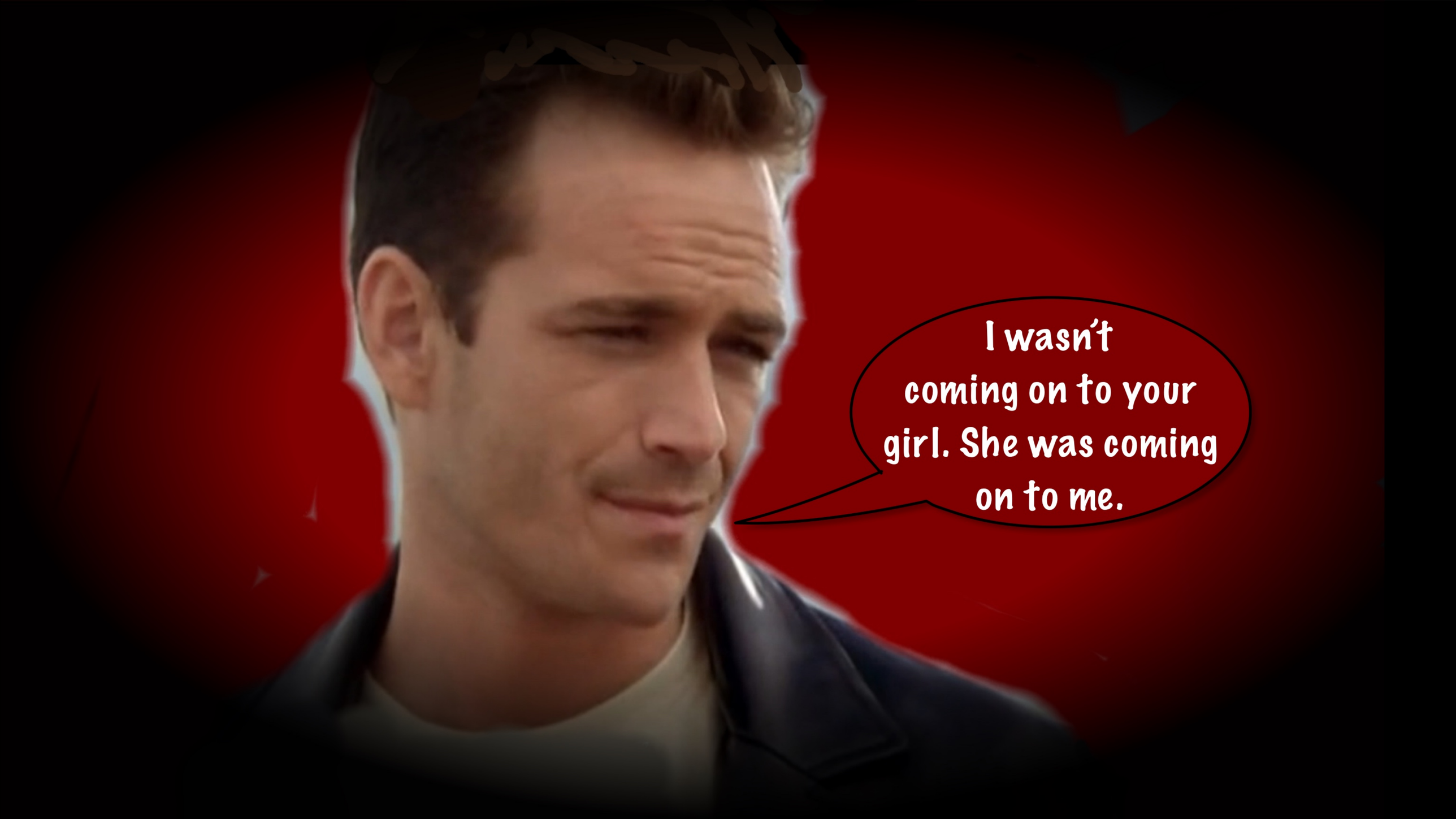

CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
Yeah, and sleight of hand, the usual.


Gabby spots Billie Peeler on the midway.
Billie! C'mere, huh?


She stops.


You wink at my girl, buddy?
No!


Yeah? But I seen ya. I don't like you coming to my girl.


I wasn't coming on to your girl. She was coming on to me.


Listen, buddy.
I'm not your buddy.

Billie's eyes rack focus onto the sailor, who's about to jump Thax.




Gabby smacks the counter with his blackjack.
Gawaan! Beat it!
Your mother's a whore.
THWACK!
The sailor slinks off.


He wants to see Rob
for a job. Take him, huh?


Sure. Follow me.

Thax and Billie stroll down the midway.




That's just the way your name struck me. If I were writing a book and wanted a whore in it, I'd call her "Billie."
Too obvious. I'd fool everyone and call her an old fashioned name like Elizabeth.


That's called misdirection. That's what I do.
Really?
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES


Yeah... but I can't be more specific...
...'cuz we magicians have an unwritten law about that.
Alive! Alive! On the inside!



Thax spots Bill Duff, shoots him a dark look.


PALACE of
MAIN ENTRANCE
SPIDER
Something wrong?


Uh-uh. So, are you really the Queen of the Casbah?
Uh-huh. I'm the queen of the Kootch girls too. I do a specialty dance.


I bet you're good.
I am.


I'll come and see you in action sometime.
Not if Rob gives you a job, you won't. You'll find Rob upstairs.

Billie walks him around to a back door.




Where will I find you?
I'll know where to find you if you get the job.


You didn't mention your name.
Thax.
Just Thax?


L.M. Thaxton


I'm Billie Peeler. It's a stage name. My agent gave it to me.


Figures.

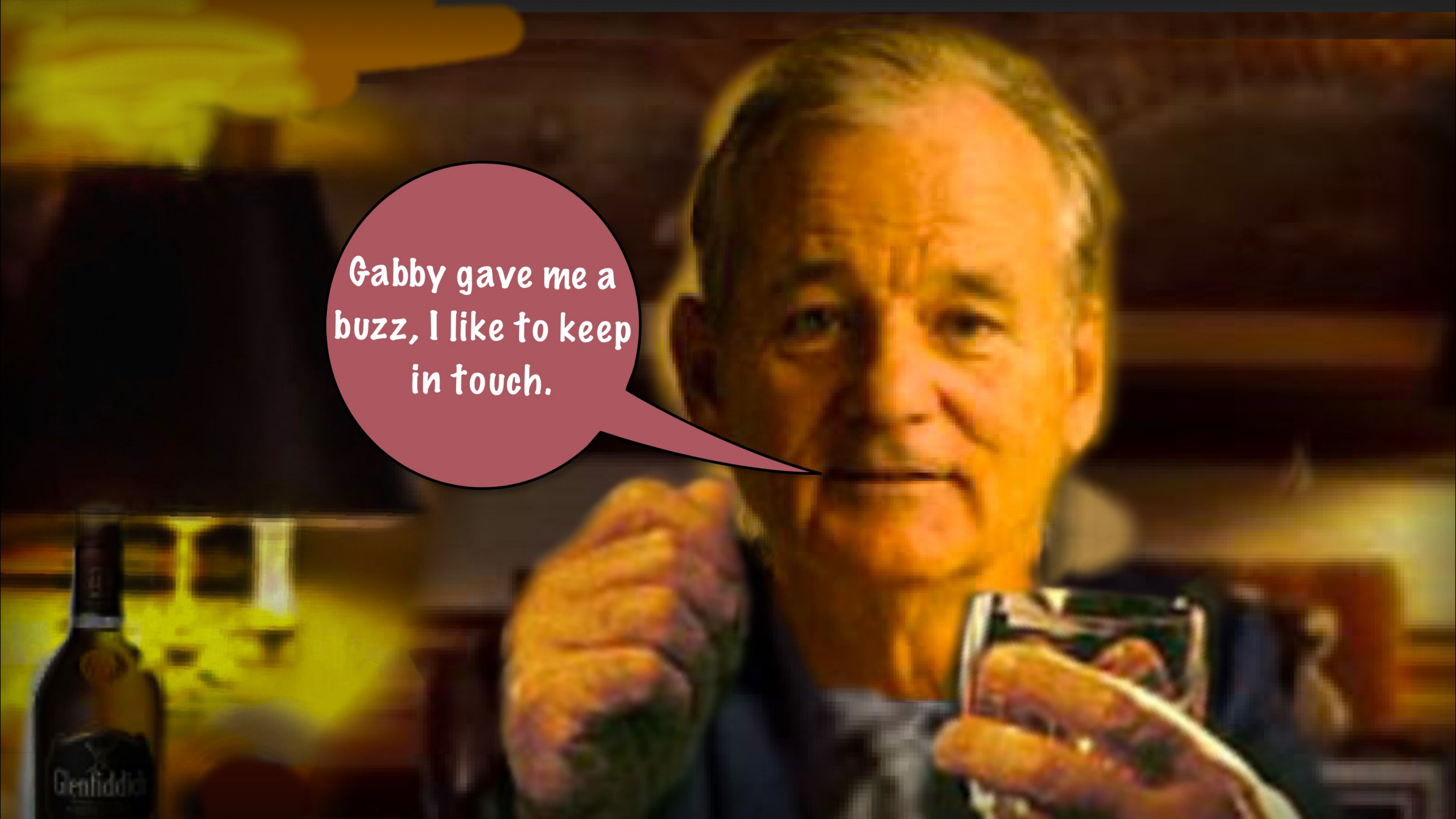

Well, I hope you get the job, Thax.


It doesn't really matter, does it?
That's entirely up to you.

Thax enters Rob Cochrane's office.




The word
really gets around,
or did you guess?
Live every day
like it&s your last.

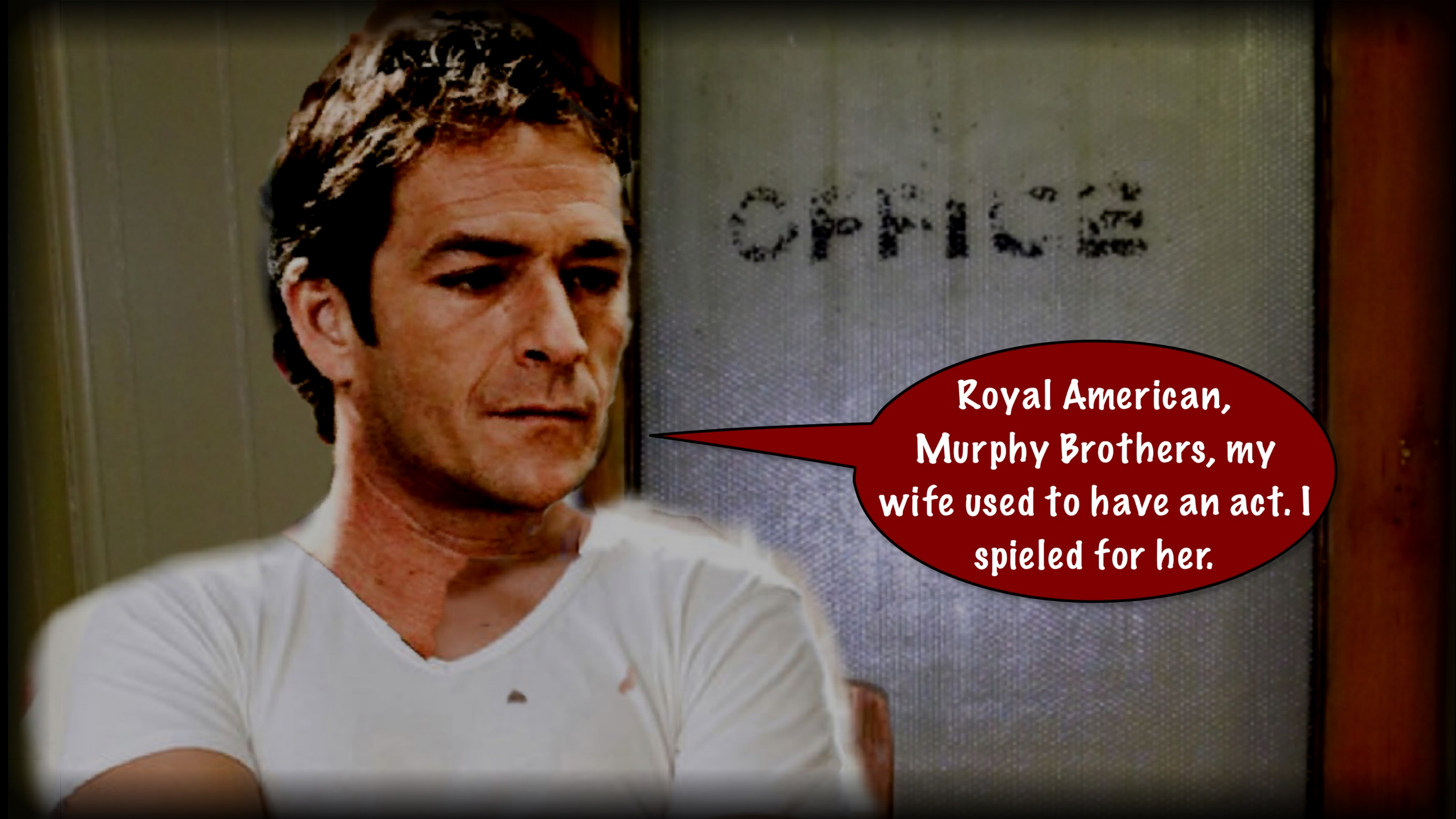

Gabby gave me a buzz, I like to keep in touch.


Live every day
like it&s your las
Gabby?
Oh, the shooting
gallery op.


You a drunk?
No.
I'll take your word on that. Spielers I don't need, dime a dozen.


So are strippers, but who ever turns a pro down?


You're
that good, huh?
Who you worked
for?


Royal American, Murphy Brothers, my wife used to have an act. I spieled for her.


What's
your name?


L.M. Thaxton.
Thax is good enough.
L.M.?
Leslie Mendelsohn.


Okay. This sleight of hand stuff, you any good?



Thax hunches forward.



He flicks his finger.



Cochrane's eye trembles.



He palms the coin.


It's in your pocket, huh?


Nope.


You got skills all right. You any good at the shell game?


Not bad.


Okay, we'll set you up with a joint, to add to the atmosphere.
This ain't the old carny you and I knew, Thax. We don't pick up the marks by the heels and shake them 'til they're dry anymore.


Absolutely.
Times have changed.
They sure have.
You got a problem, me starting you small?


Right now
I am small.


Good. We got a lot of old time carnies working this lot, and I do my best to keep them from skinning the marks.
Dreamland is a destination resort. We're small but growing and we gotta stay clean to grow. Understand?


Absolutely


You get around a bit you'll notice we also got high-school and college kids working here.
Kids that are young and fun and dumb. Keeps the atmosphere wholesome.

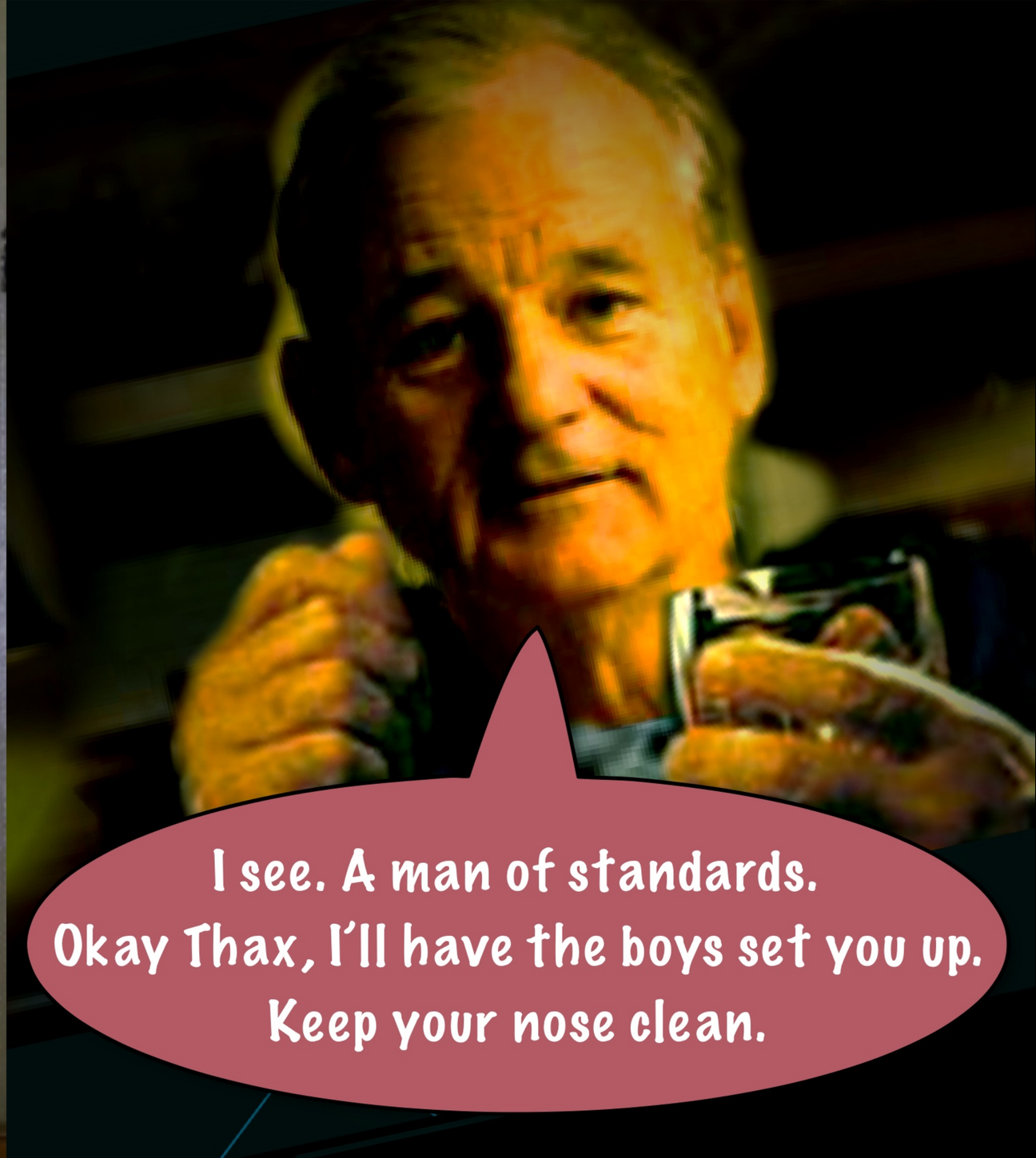

I don't want that old time squalid shit showing through the paint.
A Dreamland mark is a happy mark. Coming in and driving home. OK?


No problem.


Cochrane gives Thax an employee ID card.
Sign that. You'll need it if you want to stay on the lot tonight.
How are you fixed?
GROOM DRY LAKE - DREAMLAND
AREA 51
BASE SECURITY
4369
SECTION S-4
ACCESS CLEARANCE
LEVEL 1


All right, I got a few bucks.
Got a place to sack? There's a bunkhouse behind the Watusi Village.


No Thanks.


I see. A man of standards.
Okay Thax, I'll have the boys set you up.
Keep your nose clean.


Like a whistle.



Thax leaves Cochrane's office and heads back to the midway.


He spots Jerry, who's addressing a group of marks.
The management has requested me to warn you there's been a report of a pickpocket here this evening.


Plain clothes security men are at this moment fanning throughout the crowd. We expect their apprehension momentarily.
But until that time, ladies and gentlemen...
...please watch your valuables.



Jerry watches the marks all pat the pockets where their valuables are located.



Eddie, his partner, moves stealthily through the crowd...

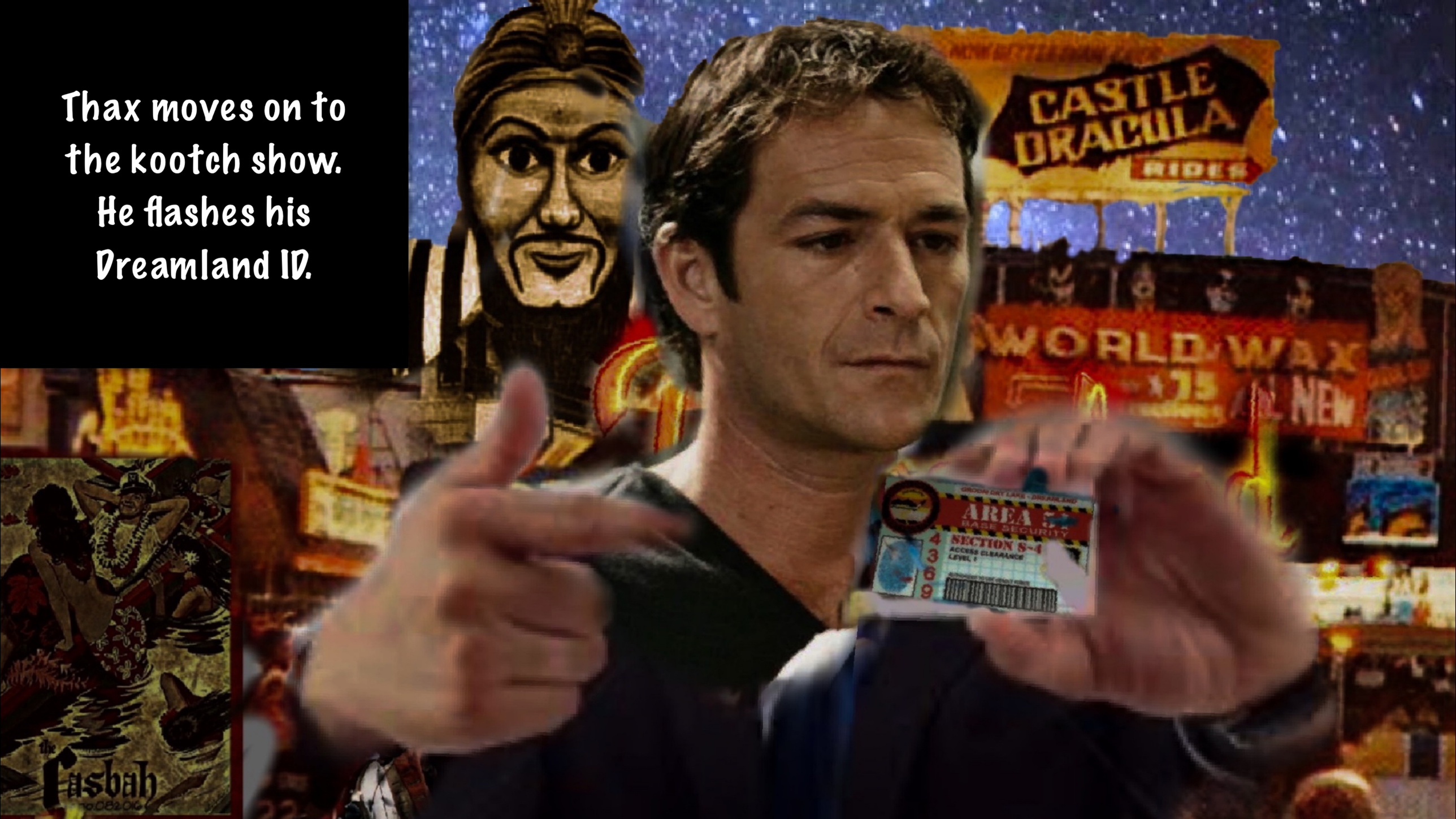


...picking their pockets.


If you see anyone behaving suspiciously, please inform a uniformed guard.


Thax passes Jerry, wise to his game, then grins and holds up his wallet for Jerry to see.
The management will pay a healthy reward for his, or her, apprehension. Thank you.

Thax moves on to the kootch show. He flashes his Dreamland ID.





The ticket taker gives him a dirty look. He ignores her and enters.


Thax finds his way to an empty seat in the back.


On stage, a line of kootch girls dance.



Three musicians in Malay pirate costumes sit crossed legged on the floor.


As Thax's eyes adjust to the darkness, the kootch girls shuffle offstage.

The lights go out. SILENCE, then, the reedy SOUND of a snake charmer's flute.



Billie enters.
A pink spotlight
travels slowly up her
body, illuminating the
sensual contours of
her body.

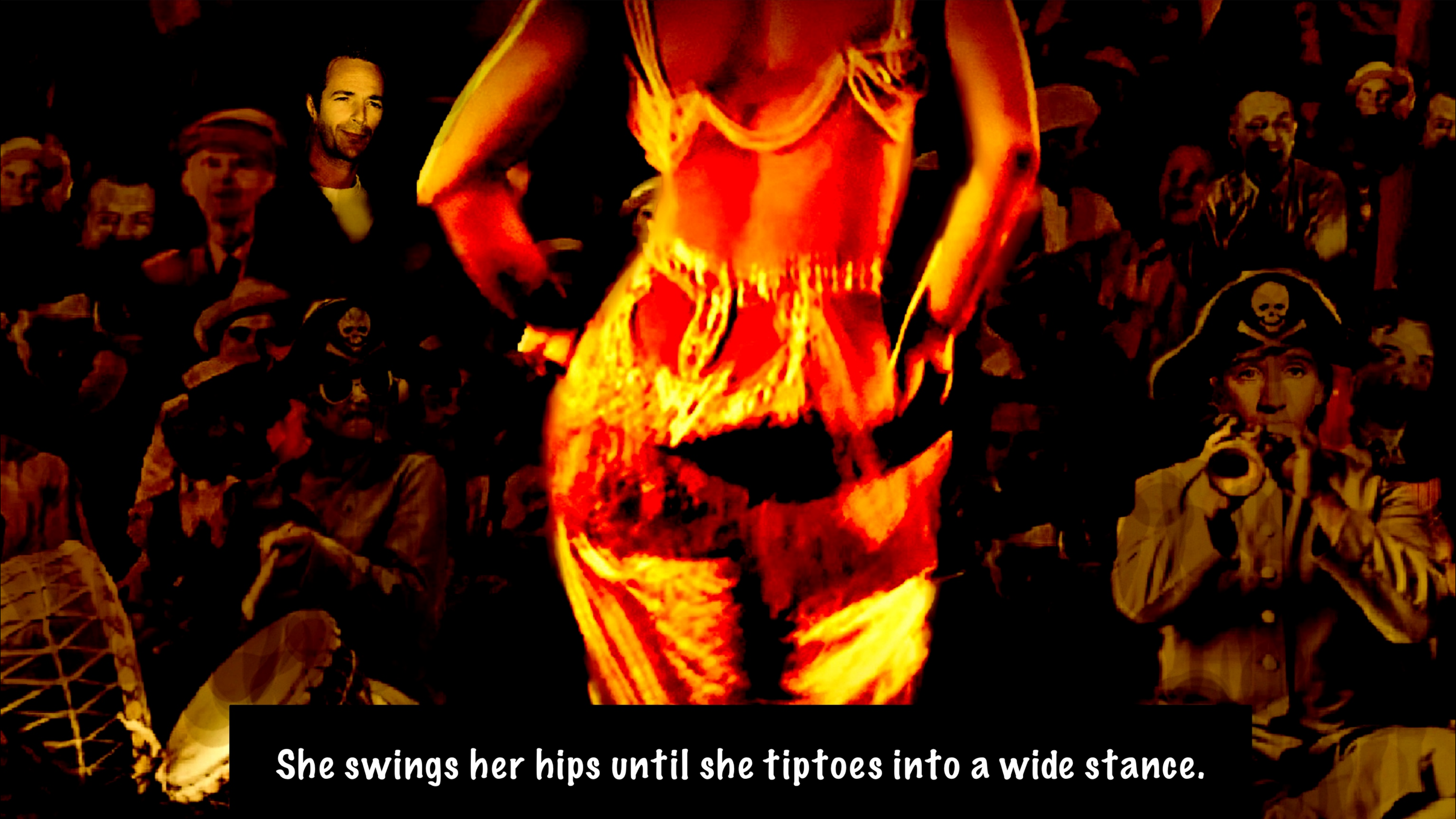


Then, a DRUMBEAT.




She spots someone in the crowd.


It's Thax.


She swings her hips until she tiptoes into a wide stance.

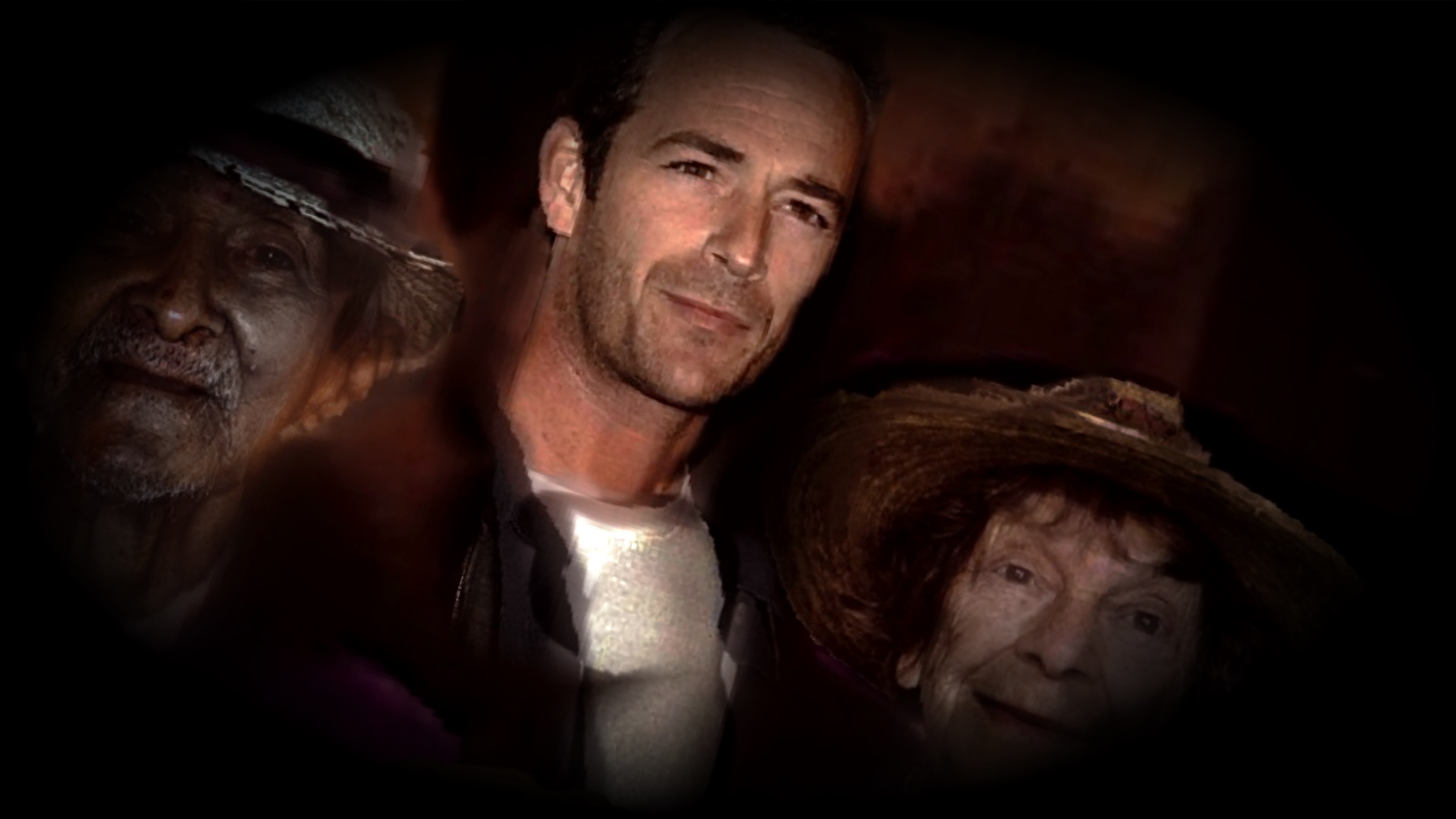

Then does an old school stripper's hip sling.


WHAM!

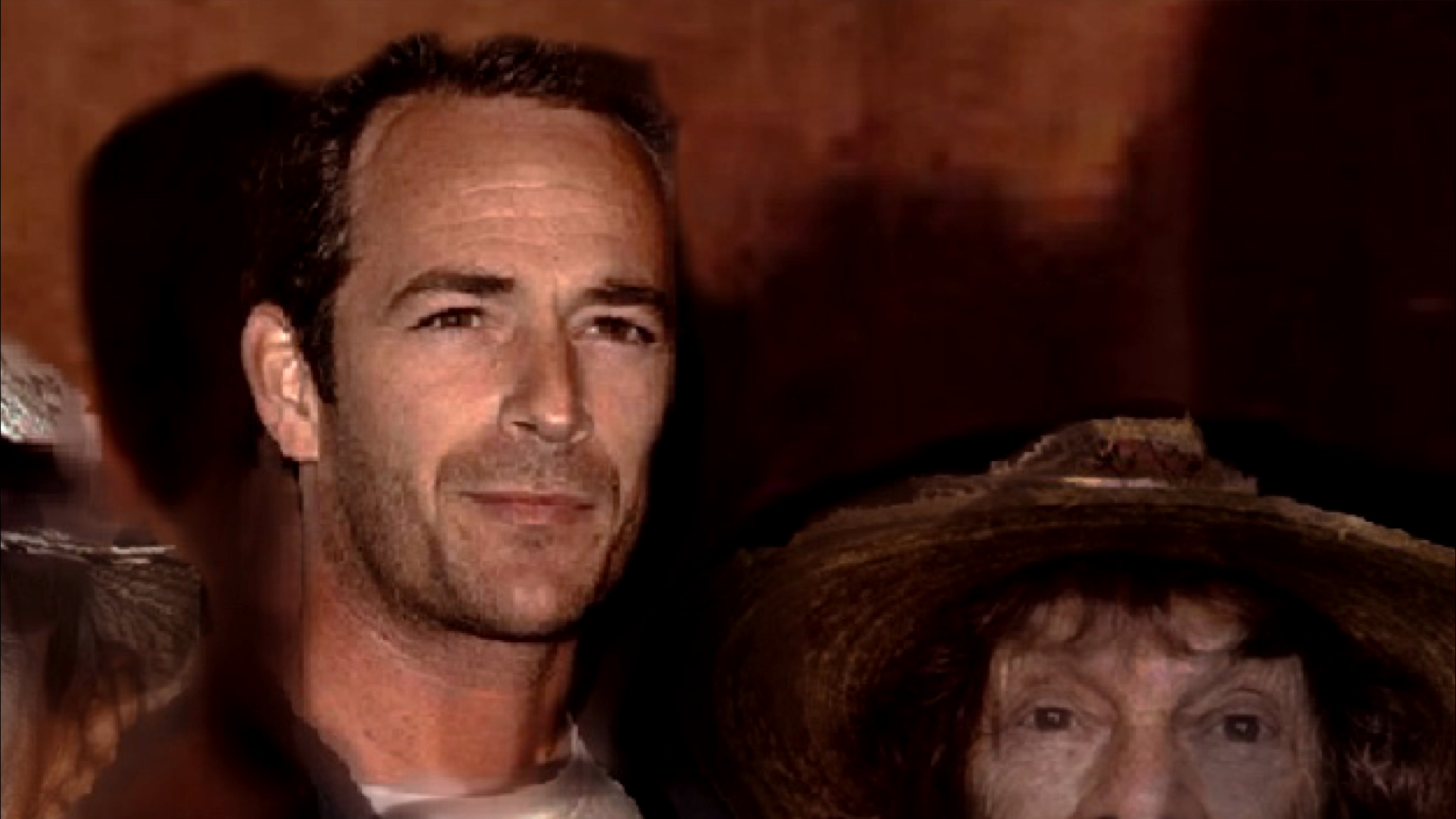

BAM!


WHAM!

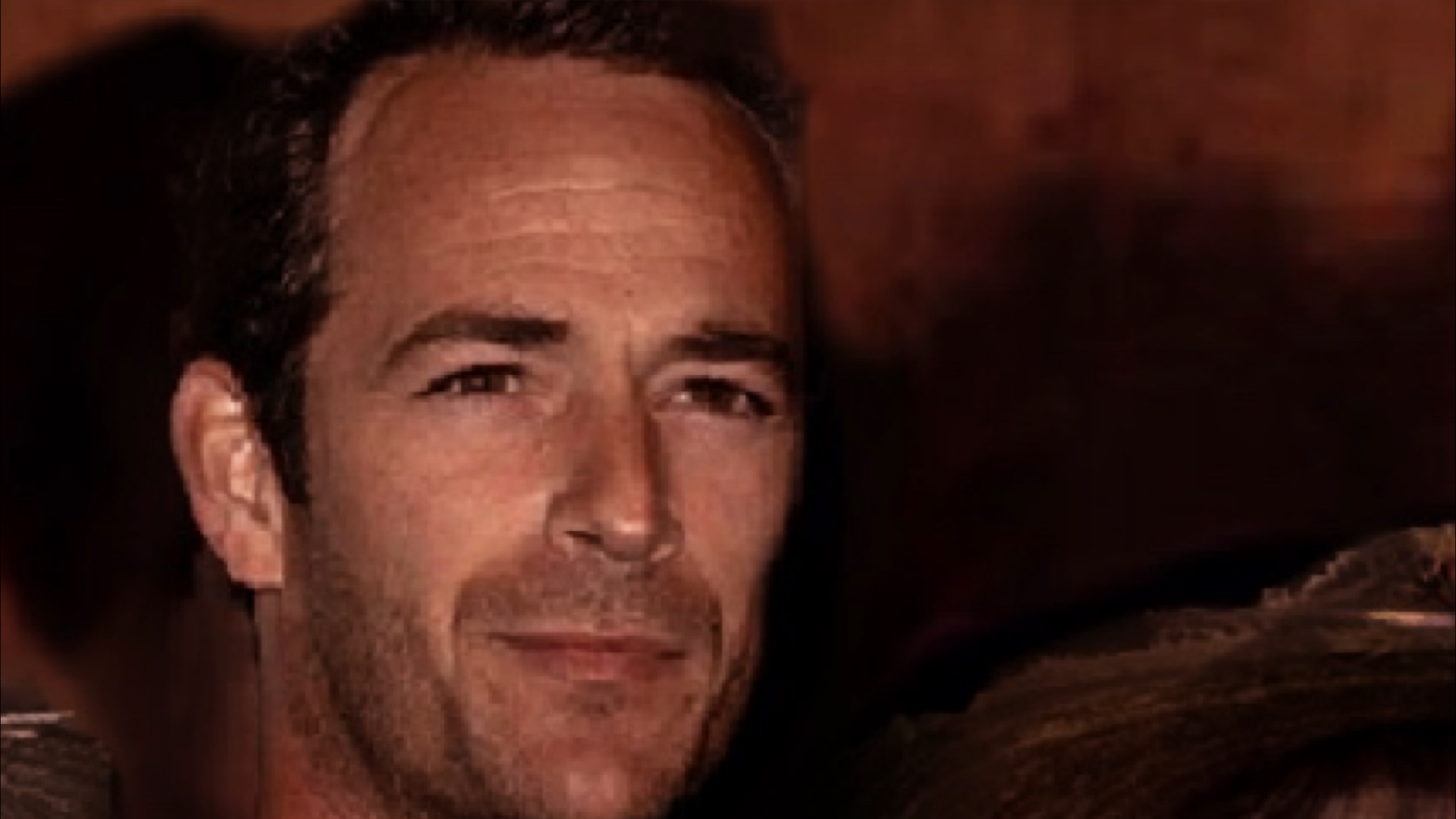

BAM!




Her hands fondle suggestive
and invisible objects.



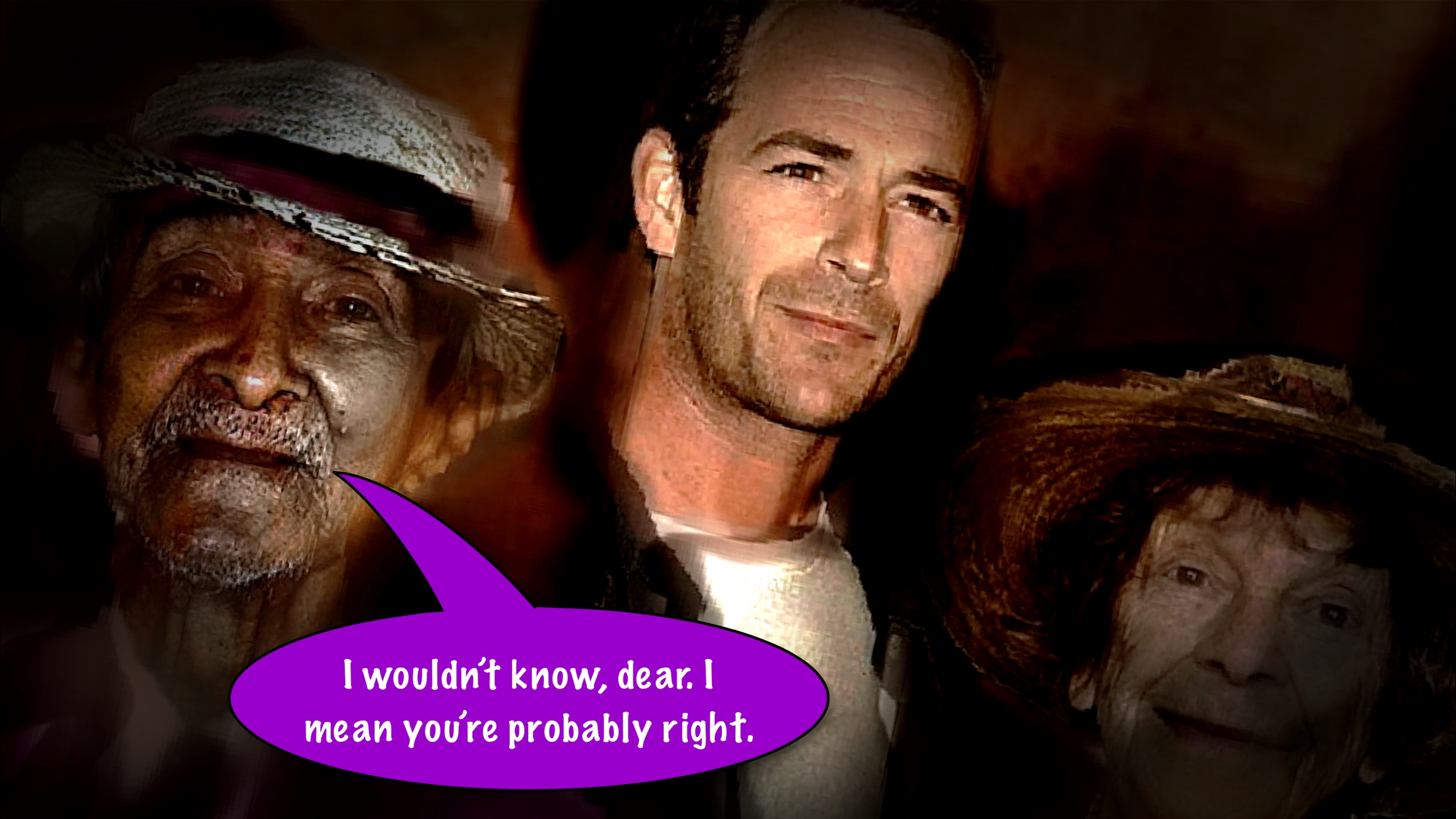





Then...


The lights go out.


That was not an authentic Berber courtship dance. That is a sex dance, just a sex dance like you see in a strip joint. Those were definitely not authentic North African instruments.


I wouldn't know, dear. I mean you're probably right.

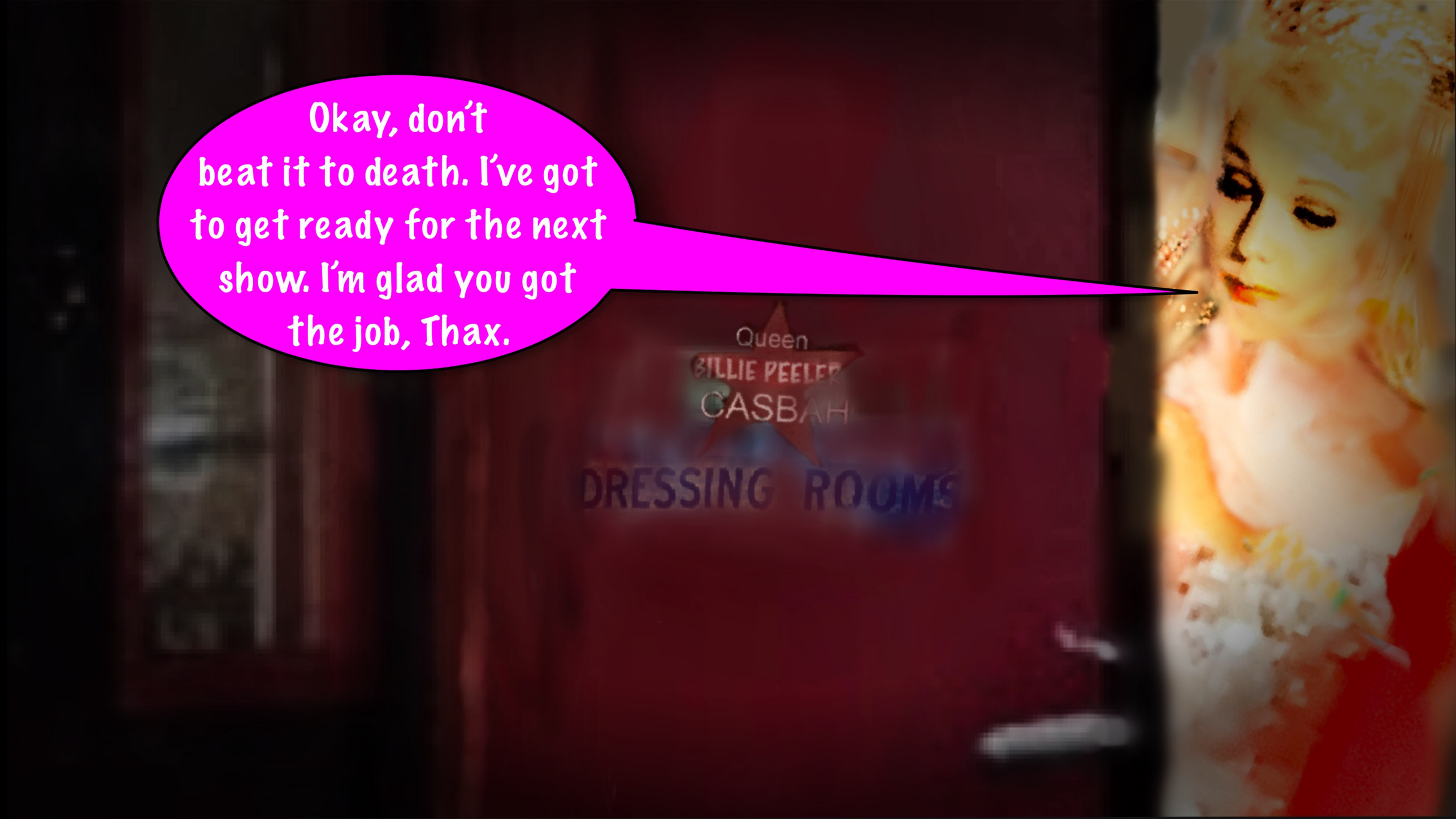

As Thax exits the tent, the flute player, Dickie, tags him.
Mr. Thaxton? Miss Peeler wants to see you.


Me? Why?
I wouldn't know but be sure to look me up and tell me when you find out.


Billie steps out of her dressing room.
Did Rob Cochrane give you a job?
Yeah. A shell game on the midway.
Then why did you come in here? You should know better. It's all right for a bunch of dumb marks to gawk at my body, but not for you.
STAGE DOOR


What are you so upset about?
I don't want to think of you as one of them. They're suckers.

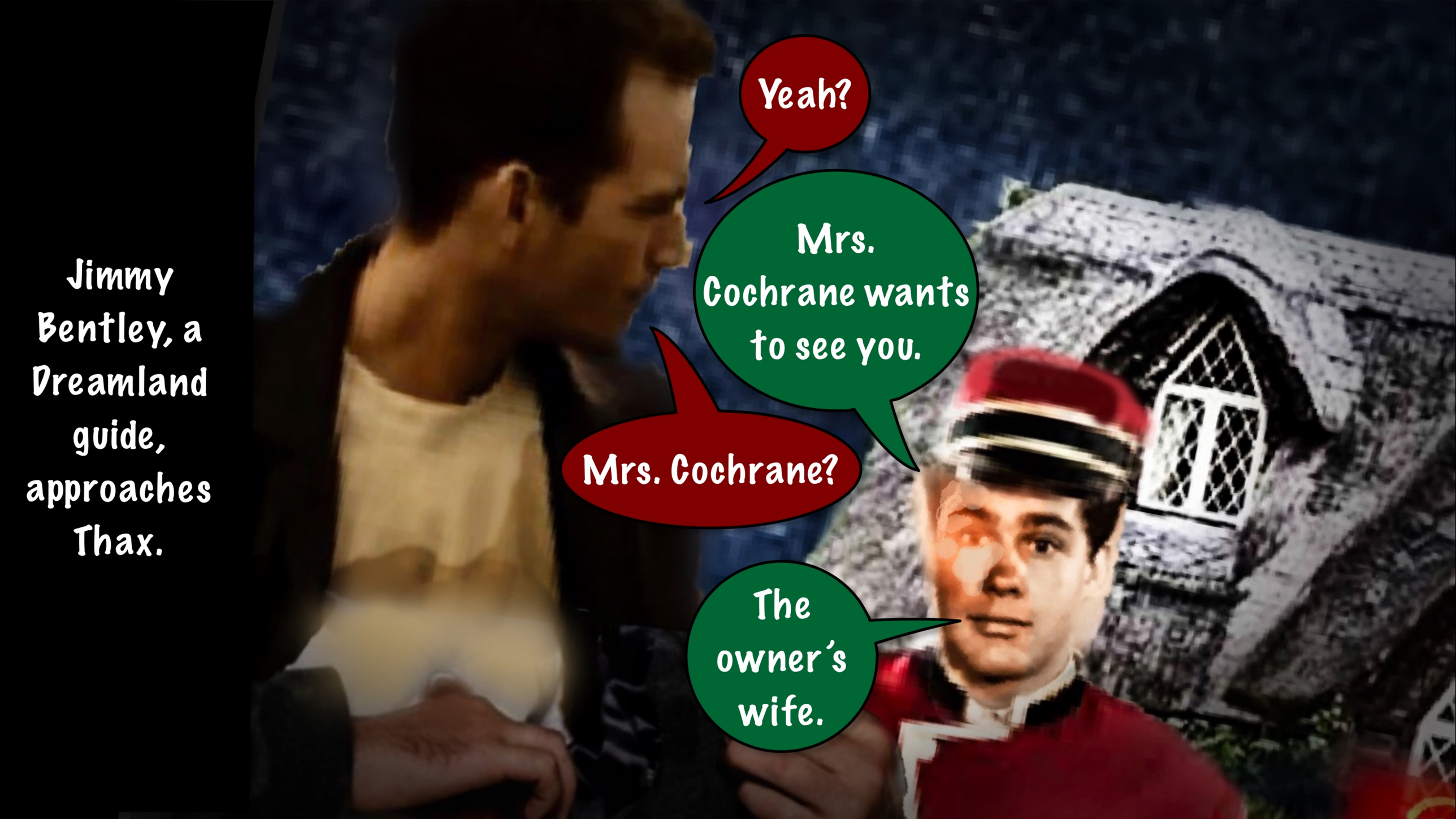

All right, I apologize Billie. I'm sorry, really. I didn't know you were serious.
I mean about me seeing you dance. If I did, I wouldn't have come in.
Queen
DRESSING


Okay, don't beat it to death. I've got to get ready for the next show. I'm glad you got the job, Thax.
Queen
BILLIE PEELER
CASBAH
DRESSING ROOMS


And she's gone.


On his way into Queen Anne's Cottage for dinner, Thax gets bumped by a fat guy on his way out.
Watch it big boy.
How'd you like a smashed face?
Eddie passes behind Thax.


Thax's wallet is gone.
Damn.
EAT
Queen Anne's Cottage
DINER
OPEN
Mr. Thaxton, sir?



Jimmy Bentley, a Dreamland guide, approaches Thax.


Did she say why?
EAT
Queen Anne's Cottage
DINER
I'm sure I don't know why, sir. She just told me to get you.

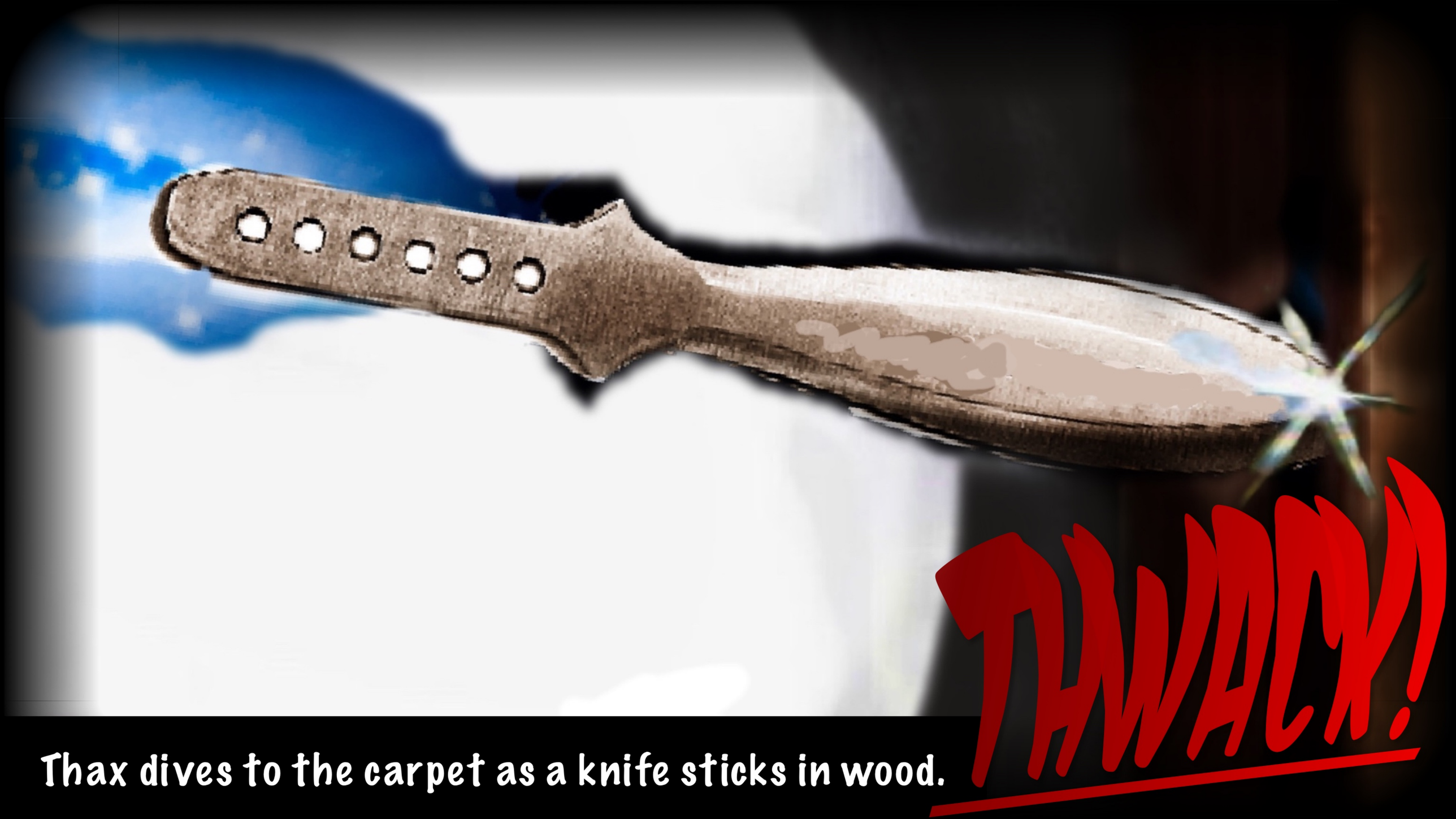

Okay, so where do I find her?
Up there. She's got a suite above the restaurant.
DINER


Thax climbs the stairway. Jimmy tags along.
The owner´s wife, she wants to see you too?
Yes sir.

Thax enters the dark room and walks into a blinding light.




A GLEAMING BLUR whizzes straight at his head.



Thax dives to the carpet as a knife sticks in wood.

The spotlight goes out. The room lights click on.




Not really. I'm
a little drunk.

Thax scans May's richly appointed suite.




Champagne? Want some?
No thanks.
You tell Cochrane about you and me?
Sure, when I first came to him.
Thax hangs his coat on May's knife.


I have nothing to hide. Anyhow, he knew my name. The word gets around.
It sure does.

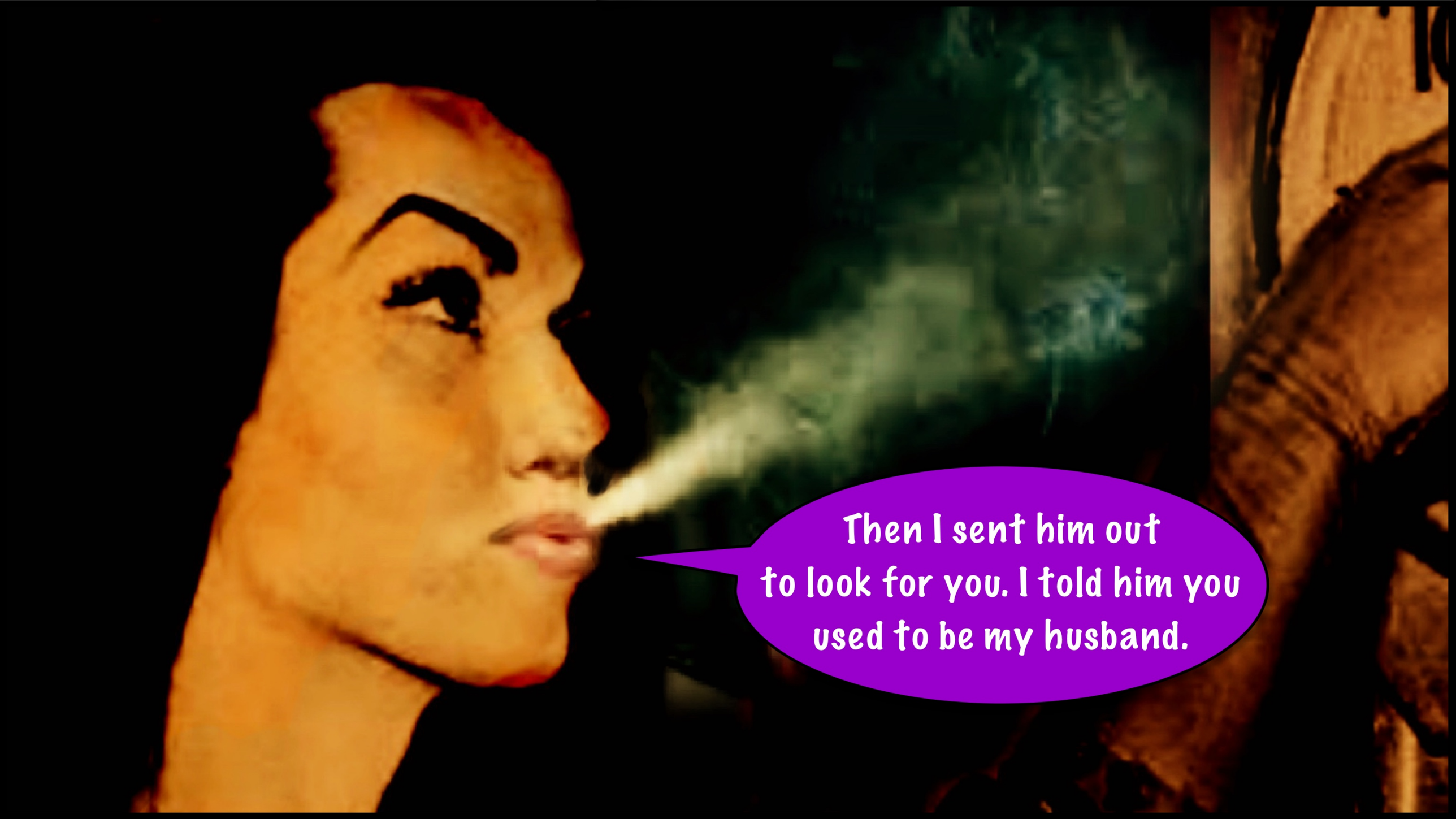
Jimmy enters the room.




No you're not.


Have you met Jimmy?
Not formally.
He's a good looking boy, isn't he?
I'm not sure I want to get into this.


I busted Jimmy down ten minutes ago, I whipped him till he cried. He can take a lot of abuse... for a boy.


Then I sent him out
to look for you. I told him you
used to be my husband.

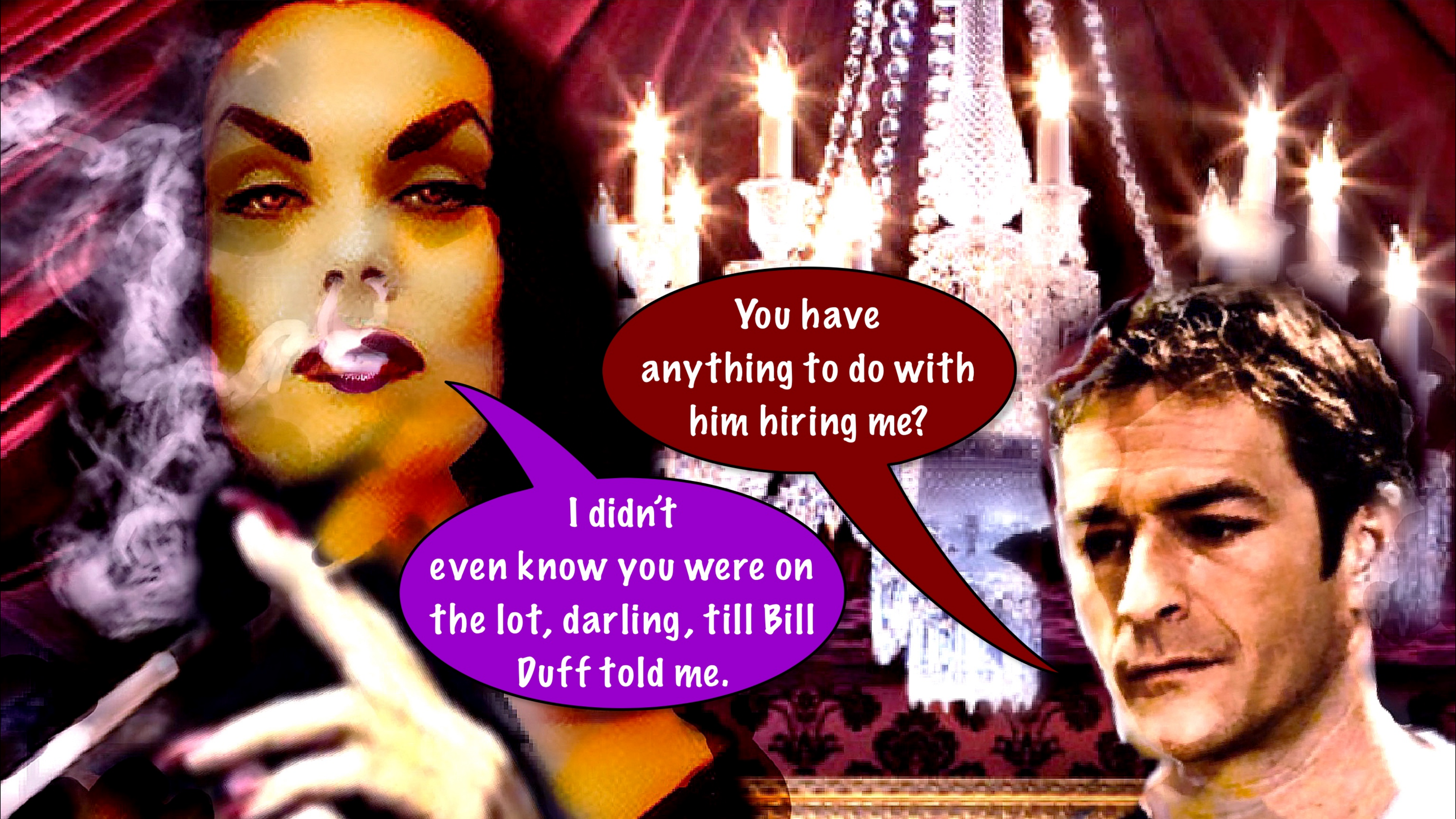

You trying to accomplish something here, May?


I put Jimmy in a dress sometimes. His face gets awfully red.

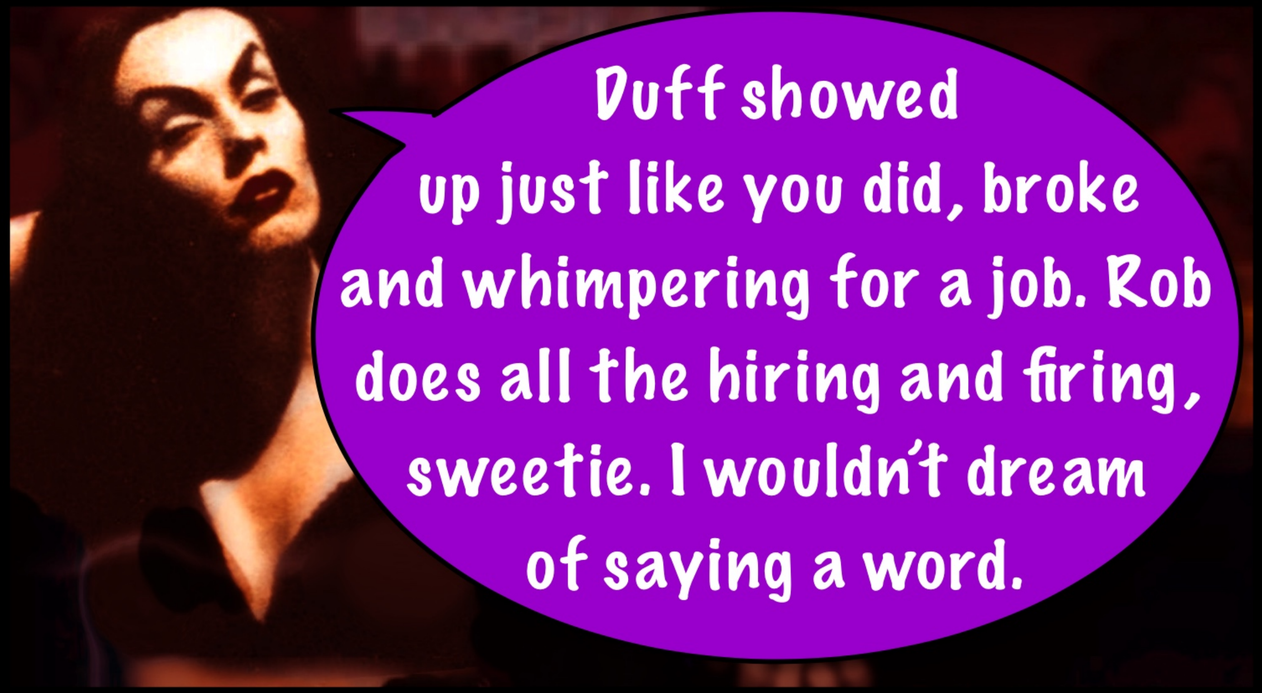

Kid, you can go.
Oh go on, get out.
Jimmy exits.


What's your new husband think about all this?


If Rob knows, he doesn't say. He doesn't come here. I go to his place.


You have anything to do with him hiring me?
I didn't even know you were on the lot, darling, till Bill Duff told me.


Cozy for you and Duff, huh, this set up?


Duff showed up just like you did, broke and whimpering for a job. Rob does all the hiring and firing, sweetie. I wouldn't dream of saying a word.


You cheat on Cochrane with Duff too, like you did with me?


I don't hate Rob.
But you hate me.
Used to. Now I'm curious.


She unzips his pants and reaches inside.
This might be enough for a kootch show slut. Haha!


You gonna run me off May?
Why? We travel in different circles now so I don't think there'll be much occassion for awkward encounters. Let's just get on with our very different lives.


You can go now, Thax. See
if you can keep your pants zipped
for a whole week in a row.


See you, May.


May eyes him strangely.
Yesss.



Jerry the pickpocket hovers around Queen Anne's Cottage, eyeballing the marks.

Thax walks up and confronts him.

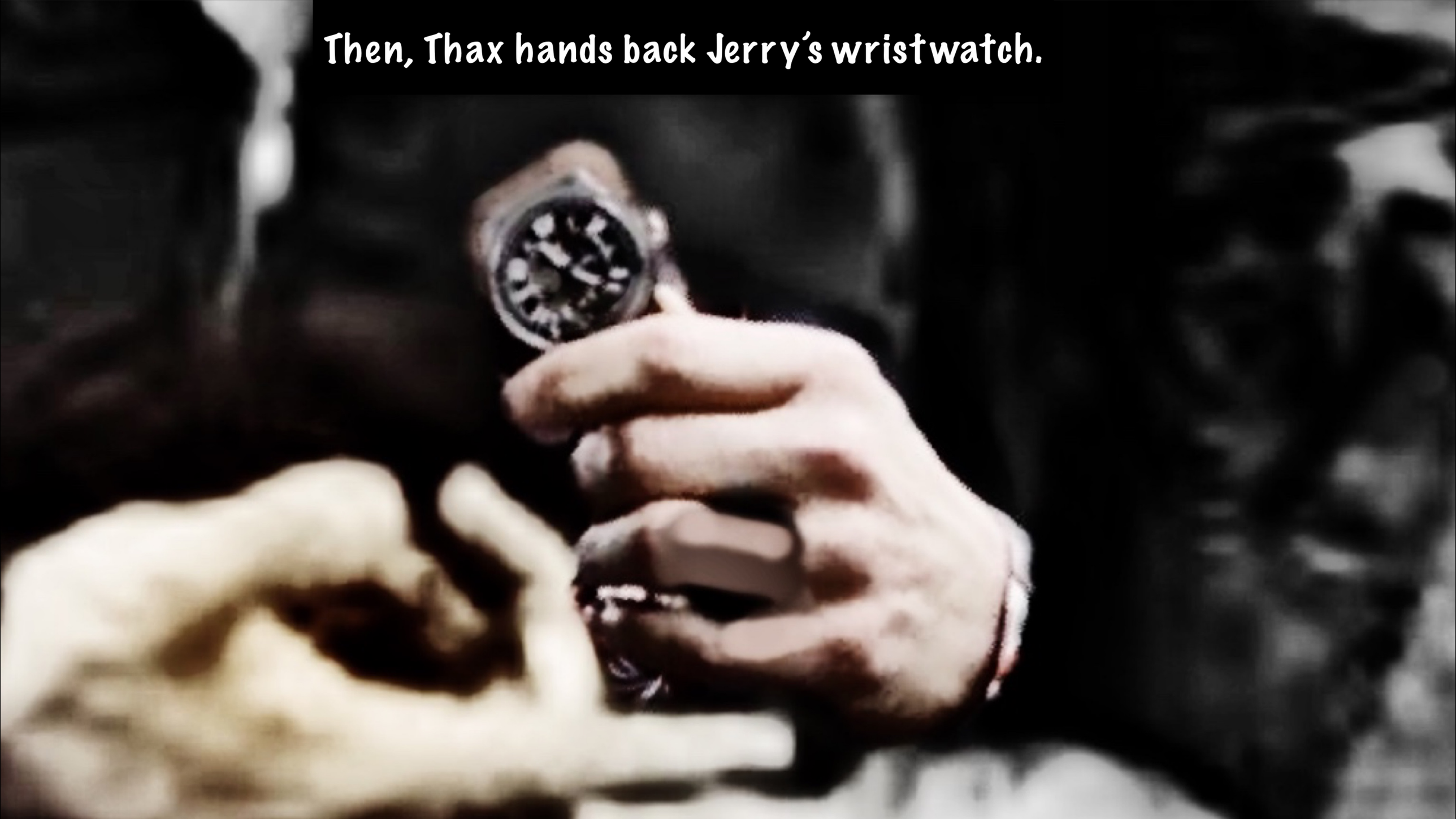

You and I need to talk, out back by the garbage cans.
Shit man, I didn't even know you were with the show. Shoulda' guessed though. Anyway, how could I turn down that flashy challenge of yours?

Jerry hands Thax's wallet back to him.




Was it the fat guy on the steps?
Nah, that was just another mark, but Eddie was in there, sneakin' around. He nailed the fat guy too. I woulda' liked a crack myself but, you know, I had to put Eddie on you once you challenged me.
Eddie must be good.


Thax hands Jerry a wallet.
This yours?
Christ!


Then, Thax hands back Jerry's wristwatch.


Queen Anne's Cottage
This yours also?
A pro of the first order!


DINER
Look,
Thaxton, you don't
want to push around those
little walnut shells with
a talent like that.


Cottage
INER
Rob Cochrane talks tough, but he lets us old timers keep our hands in, within reason, of course.


My name, racket and everything. You know it all.
Sure, word gets around. But look...
Uh-uh. Not in my line. But thanks anyway.
Thax walks away.

Thax enters Tarzan's Treehouse with a group of marks. An attractive college girl in a leopard skin costume conducts the tour.





Thax looks with approval at Tarzan's bed.

The Leopard Girl points out another, smaller bed against the wall.





Thax steps out onto the treehouse porch for some fresh air and sees...



A young man atop a tower who takes hold of a giant Viking horn.


He blows the horn.
Hoooo—hoooo


AOOOO-HOOOO
It's closing time.



The marks exit Tarzan's Treehouse. Thax hangs around until the crowd peters out, then...


Jimmy, the guide, approaches.
NEXT SHOW
All closed up for the night sir. Oh, it's you.
Look kid... Jimmy, May and me were married once is all. I got nothing against you.
Sorry WE'RE CLOSED


She can be awful mean. At least to me; she can be awful mean to me.
Listen, you do what you gotta do. Don't worry about me. I'm not a talker.
CLOSED


Thanks. Hey, you want to see the swamp ride? It's pretty cool this time of night. Got real gators out there.
Live gators?
NEXT SHOW
They're harmless, they come from the gator farm, and, ah, shoot. I forgot. I can't.
NEXT SHOW
Got a date?


Uh, yeah.
I gotta go.
NEXT SHOW
Sorry WE'RE
CLOSED
And Jimmy leaves.



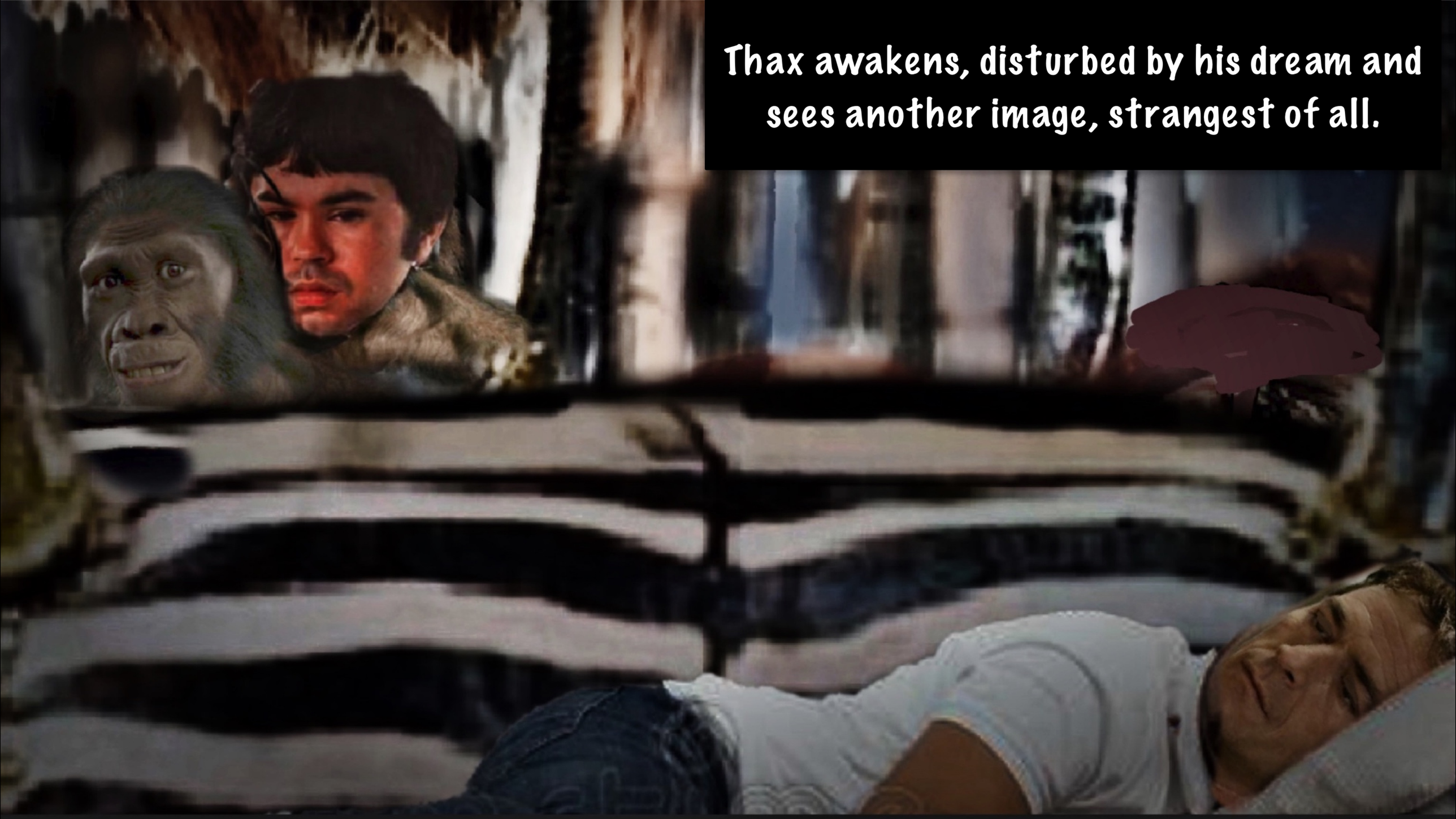
When the coast is clear, Thax goes back inside...


...and makes his way up to Tarzan's bed.


He lies down and quickly falls into a dream.






Thax awakens, disturbed by his dream and
sees another image, strangest of all.

A Monkey Man enters through the window and slips into the shadows. Thax drifts back to sleep.







Thax is awakened by the BELLOWING of an alligator.


He looks at his watch.


Thax goes out on the porch.



A little swamp boat putts through the waterway below.


He's dead. Oh my god it's awful! They'll eat him alive!

Jimmy pulls up to the dock. Thax jumps on the boat.



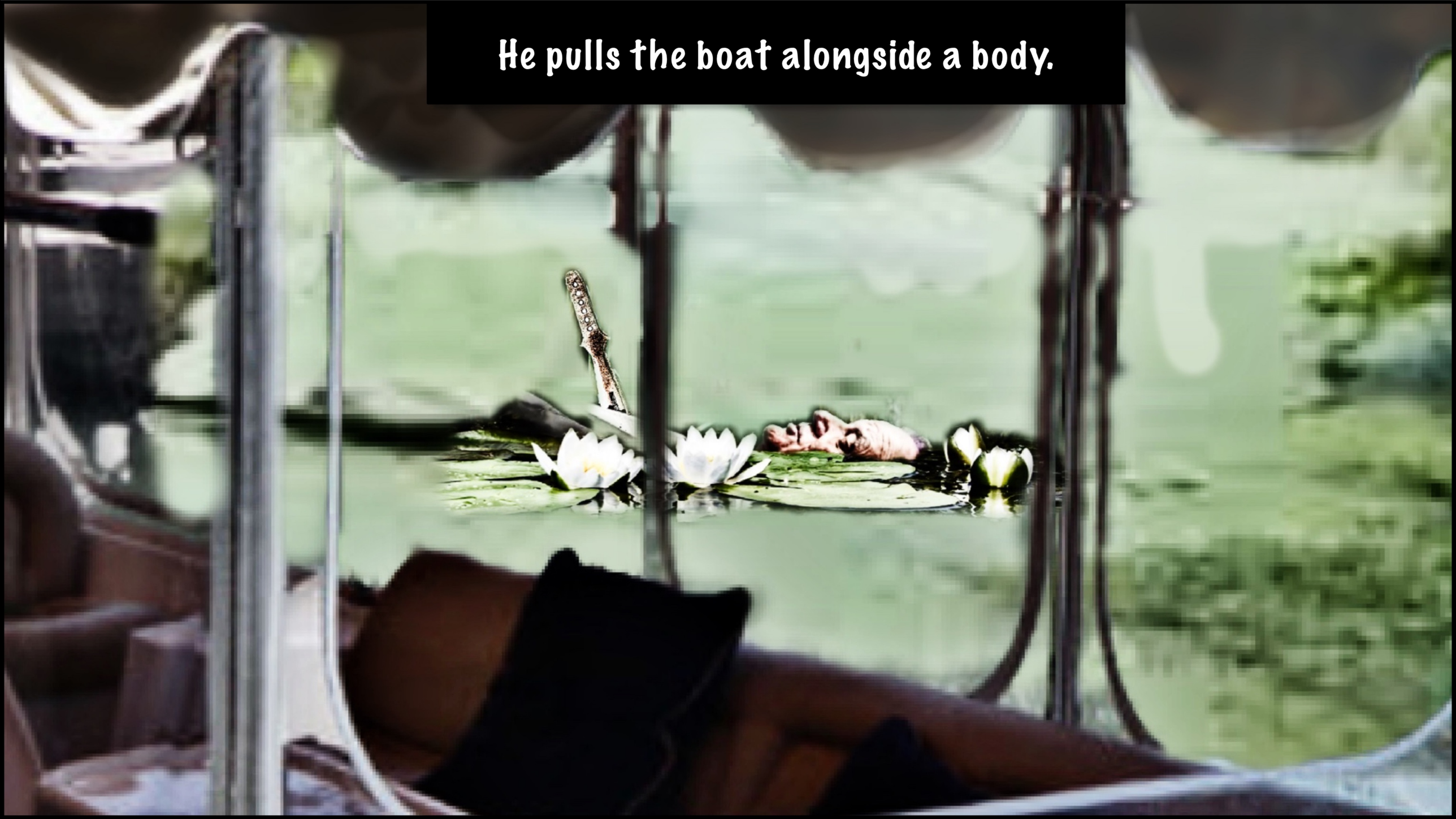

Okay. Okay.
Show me. Show me
where, Jimmy.
It's like seeing
blood. Sometimes, even big guys, they
just see their blood and it's got nothing to
do with how tough you are.


Just point out where it is, okay, Jimmy?
Down there. You can't miss it, he's like floating, right out in the open, in the water.


Yeah, all right, kid. Get out.
I'm sorry, really sorry. I just can't, I can't absolutely go back there.
Jimmy scrambles off the boat.

Thax guns the throttle and the boat putts away.




He pulls the boat alongside a body.


Some bewildered gators eye the body from the shallows.


Thax sees Rob Cochrane. DEAD. A throwing knife stuck in his heart.

He hooks the body and floats it back to shore.



Thax jumps off the boat as the security guards spot the body.




You know who killed him?
No. Do you?



Lloyd Franks, the show's manager arrives on the dock.


The deceased is
Rob Cochrane. He was found by one of the
guides at approximately oh-seven hundred hours,
apparently the victim of foul play.


We have
no indication as yet as
to the identity of the
perpetrator.

Franks spots Thax and confronts him.




I didn't ask you that. I asked who you were.
I'm L.M. Thaxton.


What the hell are you doing here? I don't know you.
Makes us even. Who the hell are you?


I'm Lloyd Franks, Mr. Cochrane's business manager.
I'm Thaxton, Mr. Cochrane's prestidigitator. He hired me yesterday.

Billie appears on the dock.



Franks pushes past Thax for a closer look at the body.


Thax grabs her arm.
Let's take a walk.


As they walk away from the crowd on the dock...
How did you happen to be around when...?


He spots something strange in the trees.
Look! That's what I thought I saw last night.


That's Terry Orme. He's a little person.

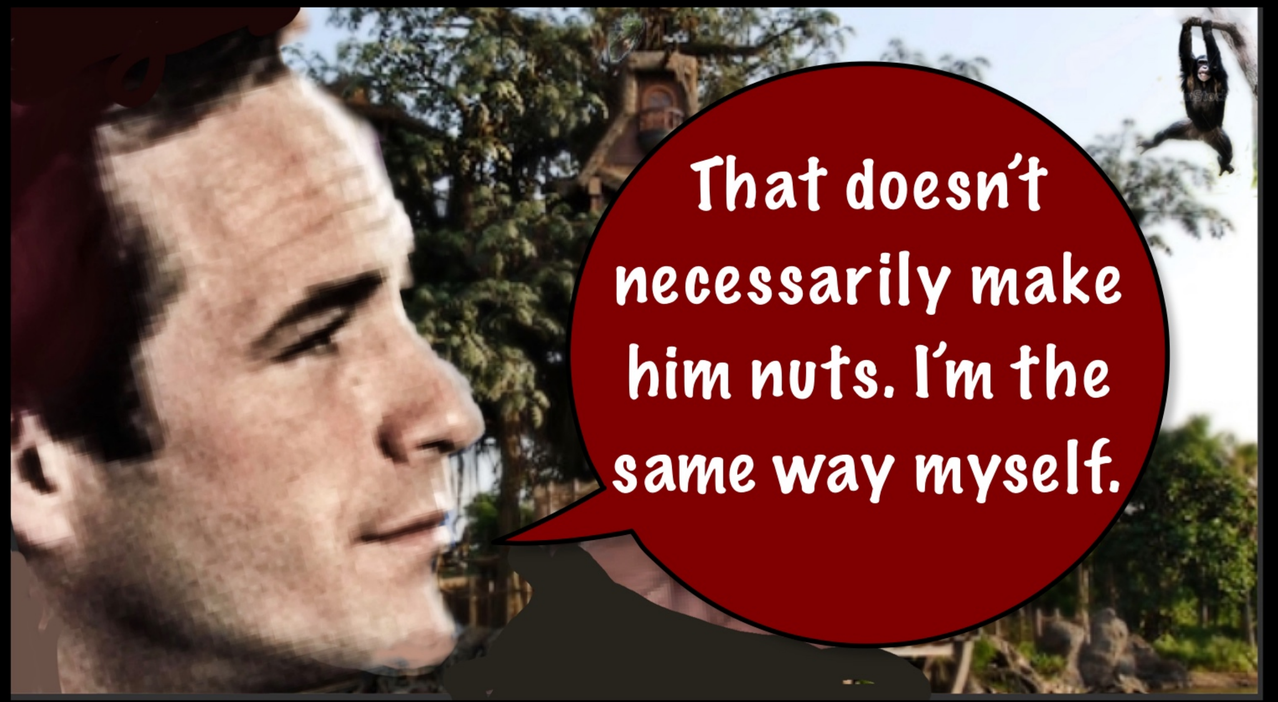

You mean a midget?


Whatever. Rob Cochrane hired him to dress up in a monkey suit and play like Cheetah. Terry's got some mental difficulties.
Such as?
TARZAN'S
007


Such as he doesn't like to be around people.


All people? Some people?


Most people.


That doesn't necessarily make him nuts. I'm the same way myself.

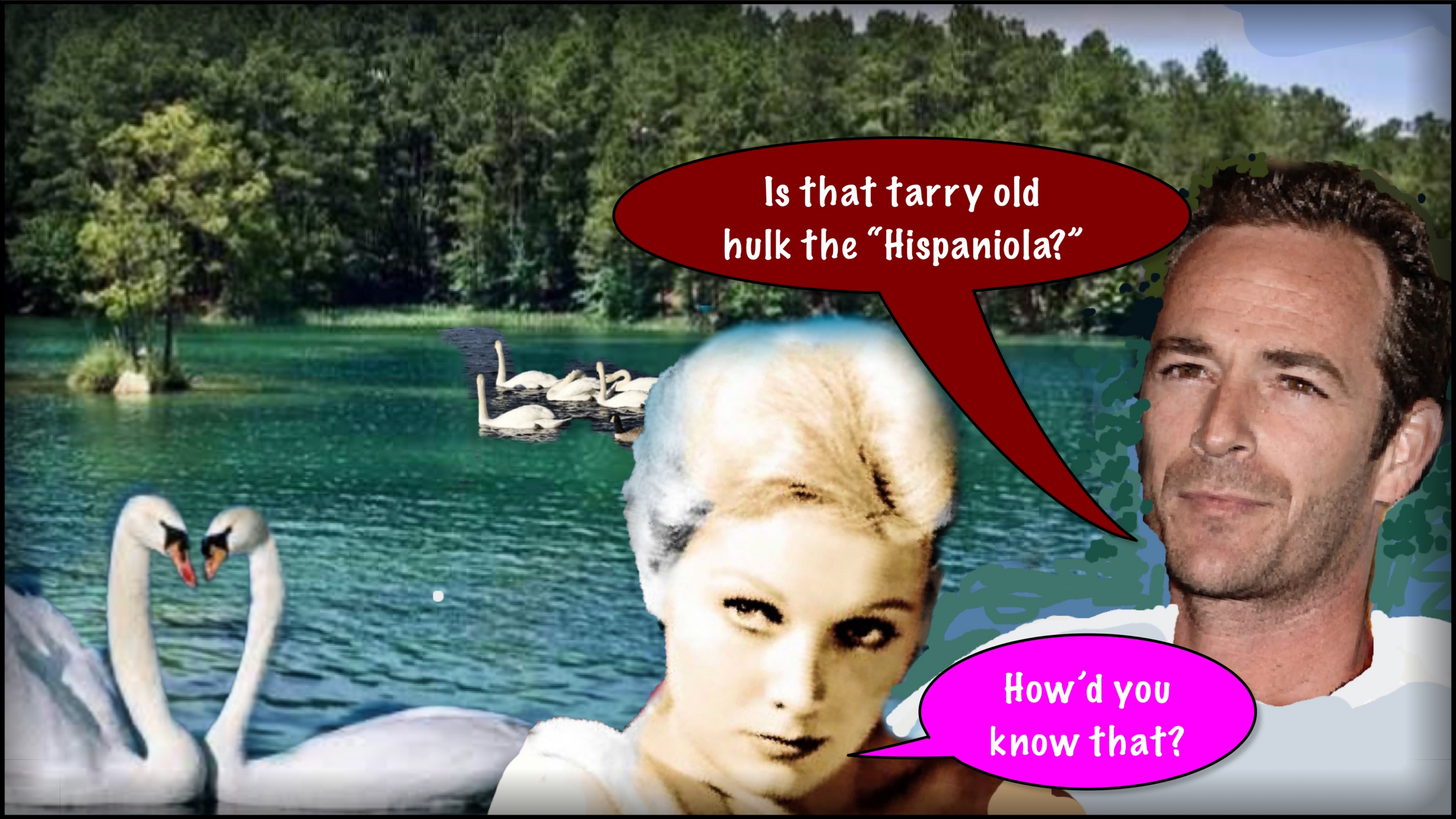
Terry Orme looks down on the scene of the crime.




They walk to a lake.



In the middle of the lake, Thax sees a replica of an old pirate ship.


Is that tarry old hulk the "Hispaniola?"
How'd you know that?


TREASURE ISLAND
"Treasure Island" was the first whole book I ever read. Let's go over.
They get into a rowboat.


Thax rows.


Do you know what I did to get my start in carny?
She speaks quietly, watching him to gauge his reaction.


Cut it out.

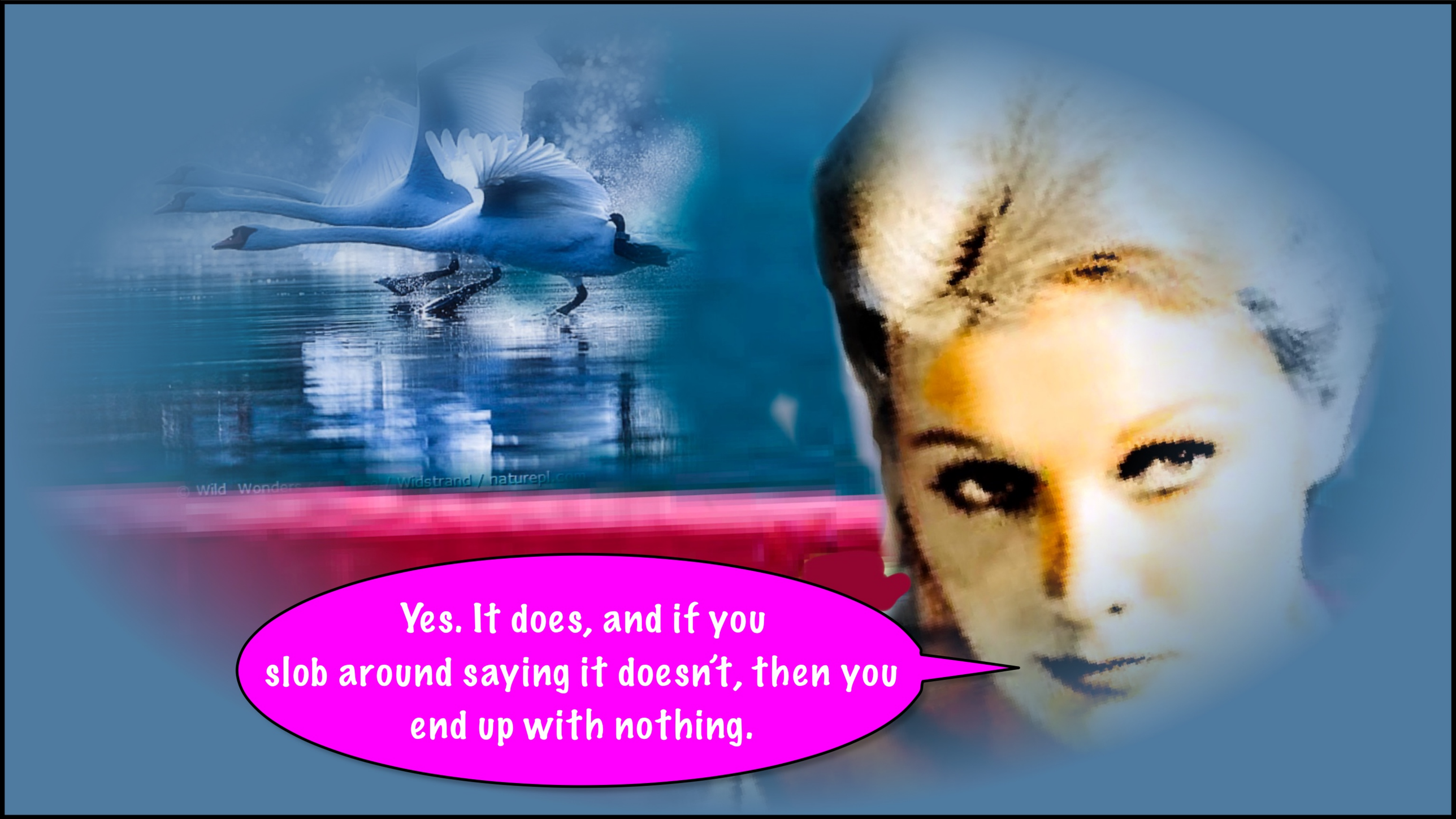

The owner was a Greek. A very fat, greasy Greek, about fifty.


But I wanted the job that badly.


Are you happy now?


No. I didn't say I was happy.


Well it doesn't really matter, does it?

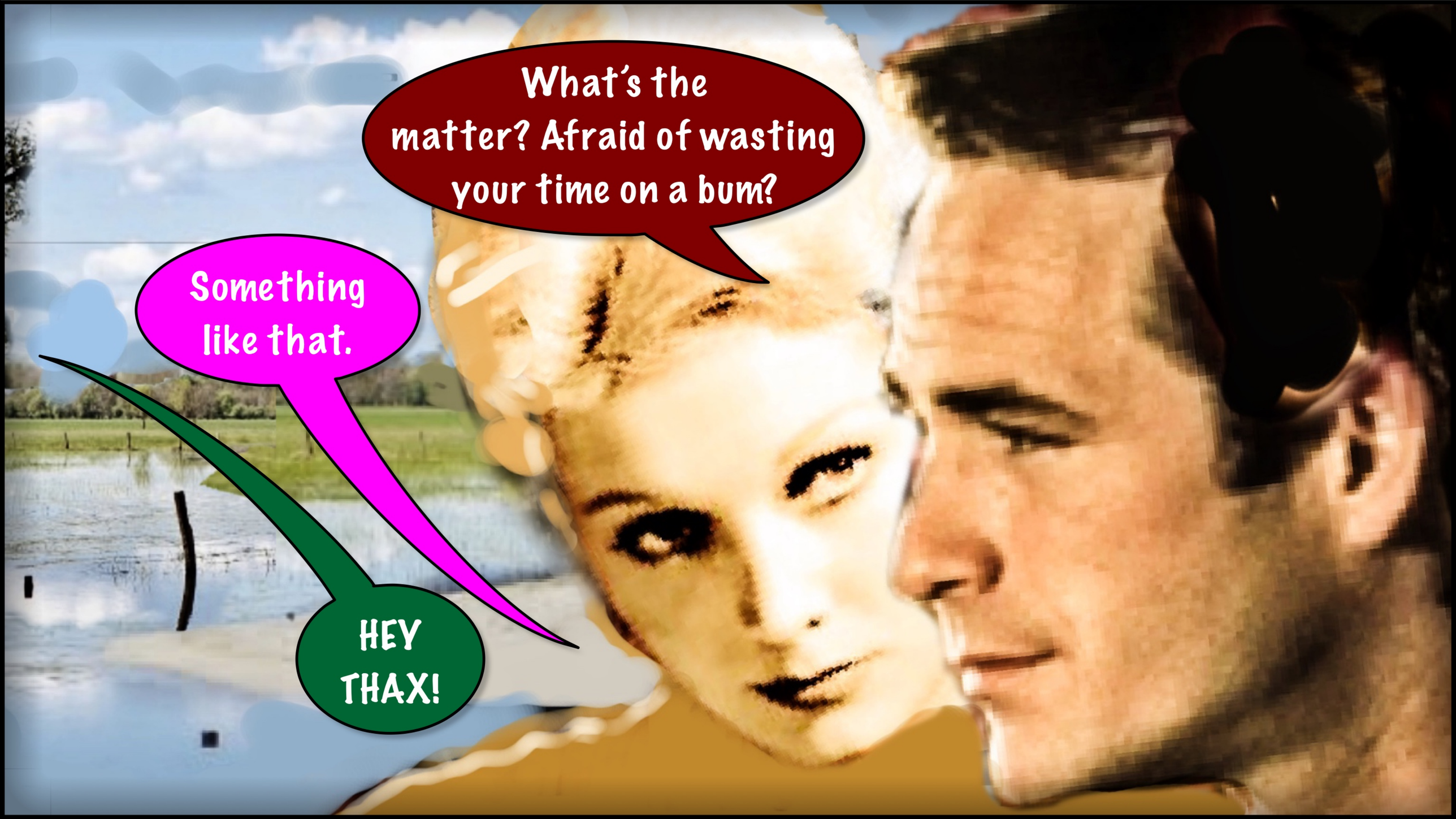

Yes. It does, and if you slob around saying it doesn't, then you end up with nothing.

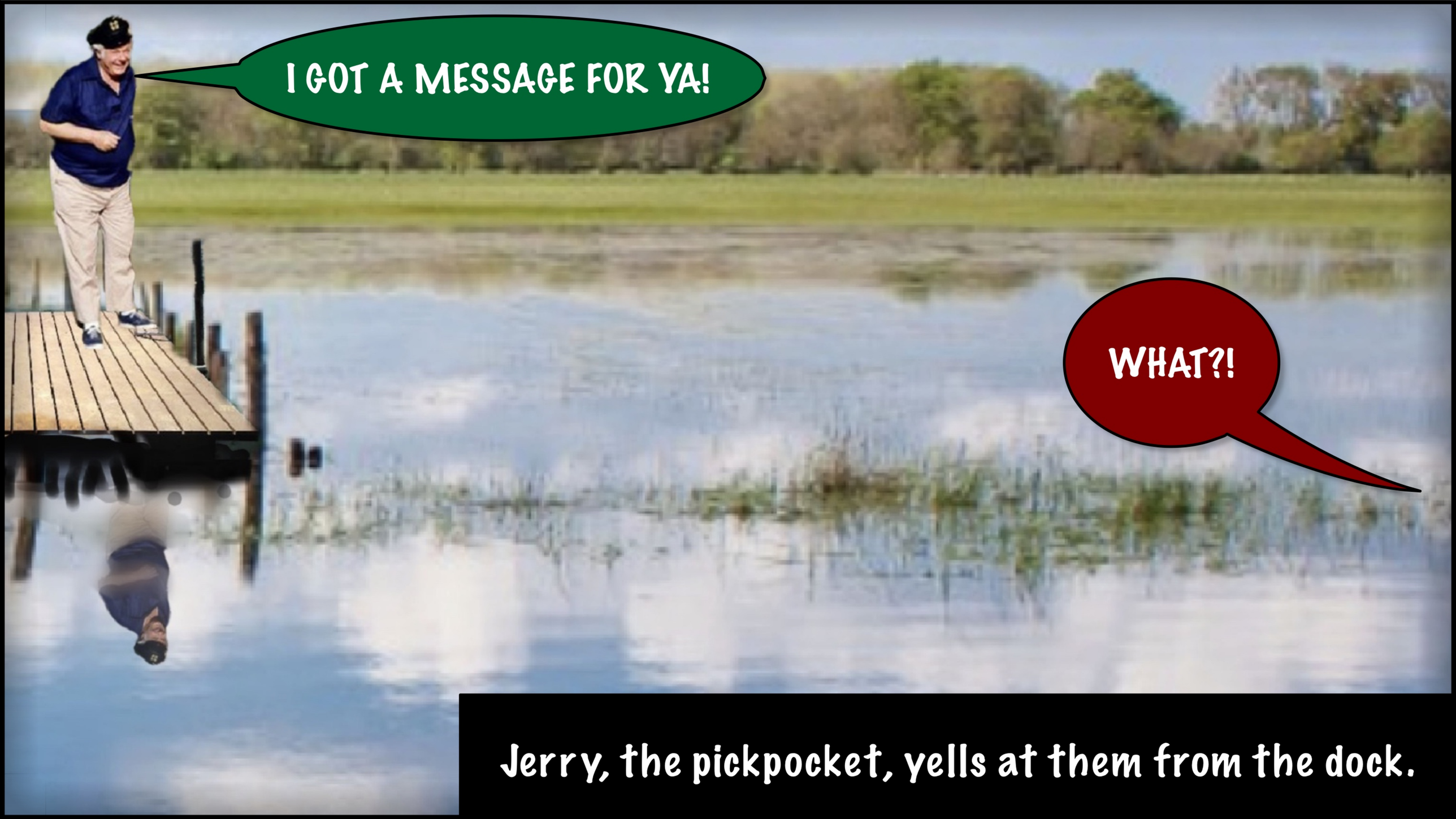
Thax beaches the rowboat and steps ashore.




He helps Billie out.


He tries for a little romance.
No, Thax.


What's the matter? Afraid of wasting your time on a bum?
Something like that.
HEY THAX!



Jerry, the pickpocket, yells at them from the dock.


THE COPS ARE LOOKIN' FOR YA!


We better
get back.

Thax goes over to the temporary police headquarters at the Okefenokee Arcade.



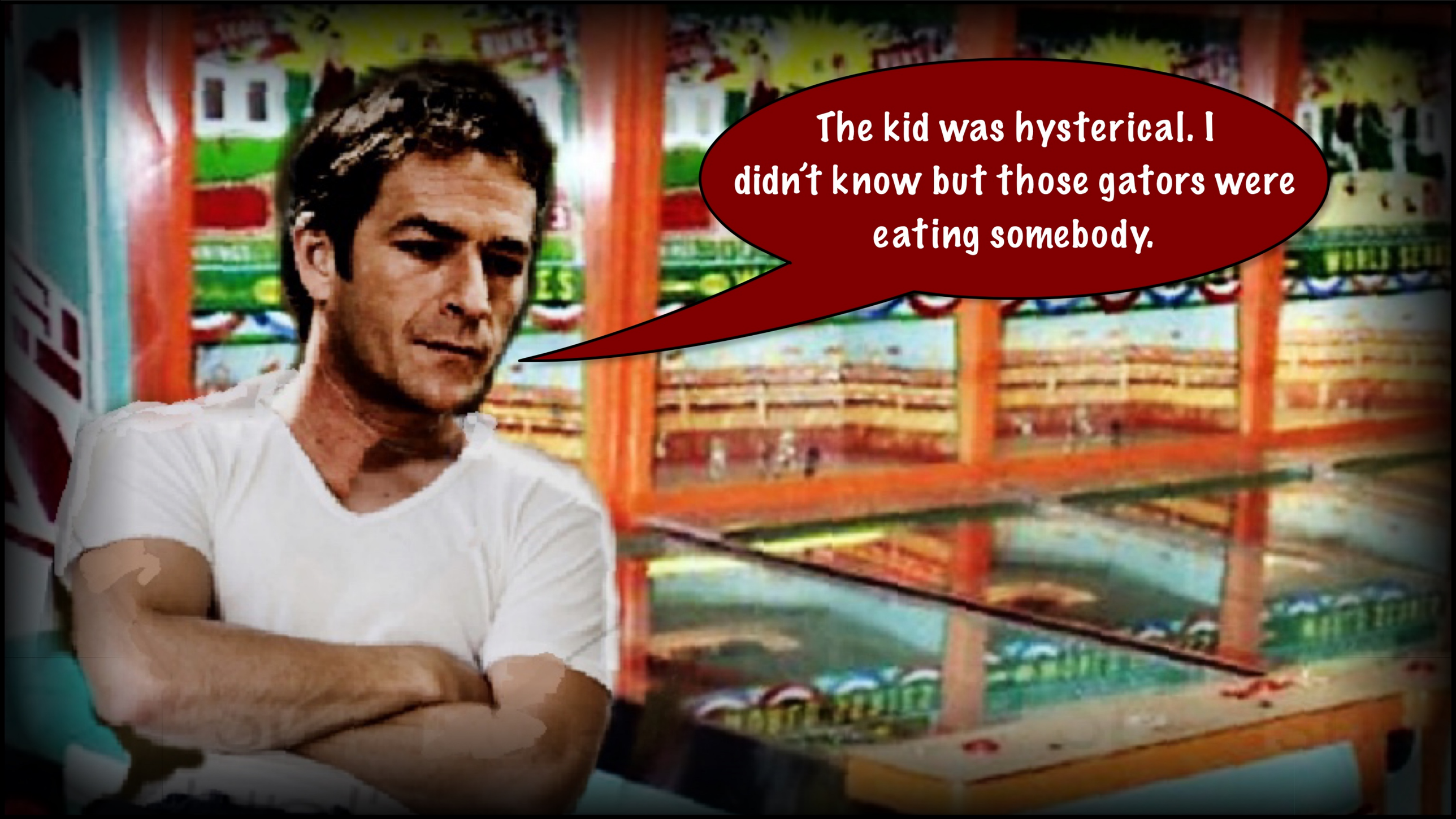

Inside, Lt. Ferris and his partner Sgt. Iturbi are waiting to interrogate him.
Sit anywhere.


What's your name?

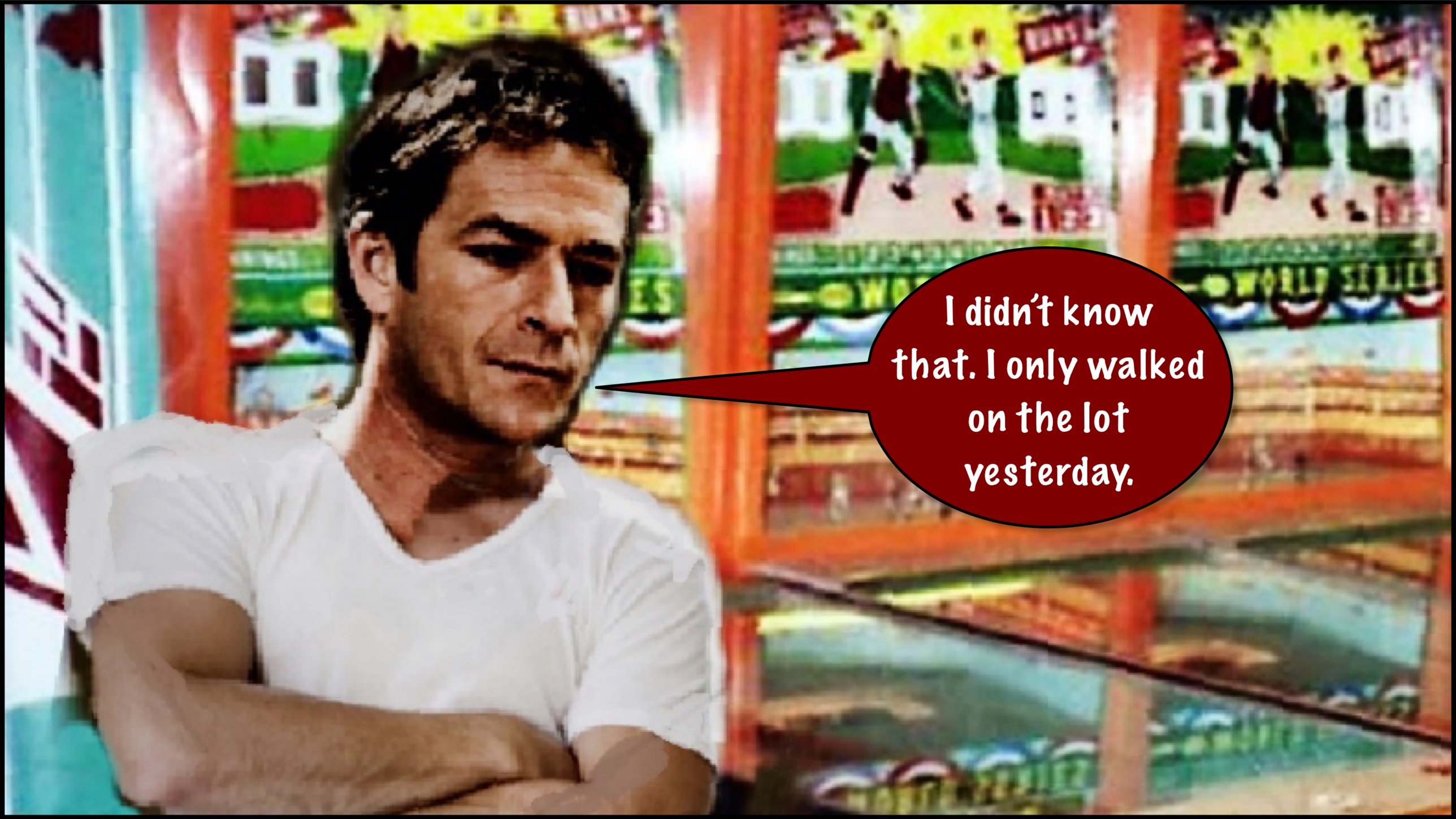

Thaxton.
I'm still waiting.
Leslie Mendlesohn Thaxton.
Where are you from?


Hammond, Indiana.
What a shithole.

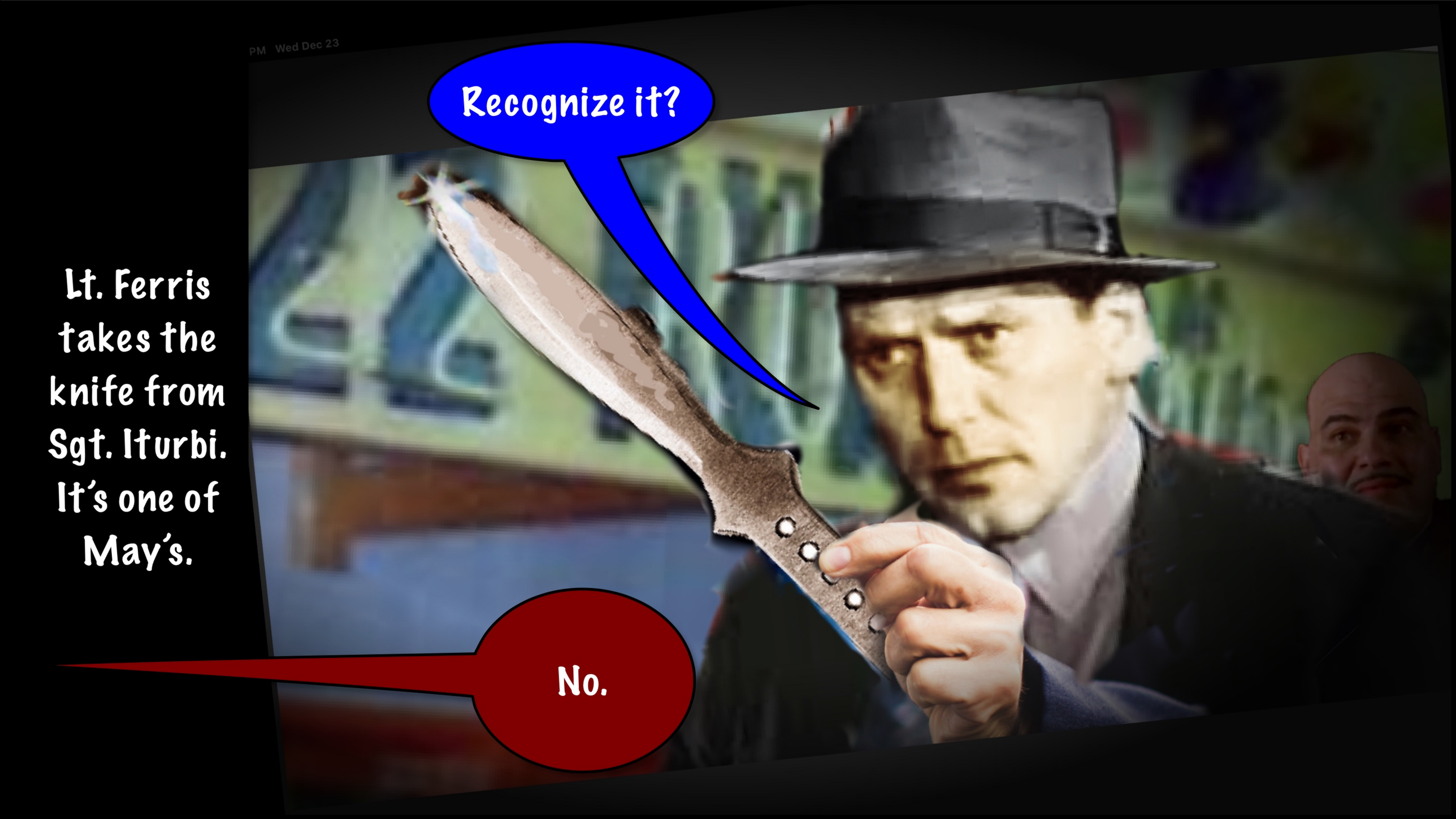

Why'd you haul a stiff all over the Swamp Ride? Don't you know you're not supposed to move dead people around?


The kid was hysterical. I didn't know but those gators were eating somebody.


According to Lloyd Franks, the business manager, those gators are safe as housepets.


I didn't know that. I only walked on the lot yesterday.

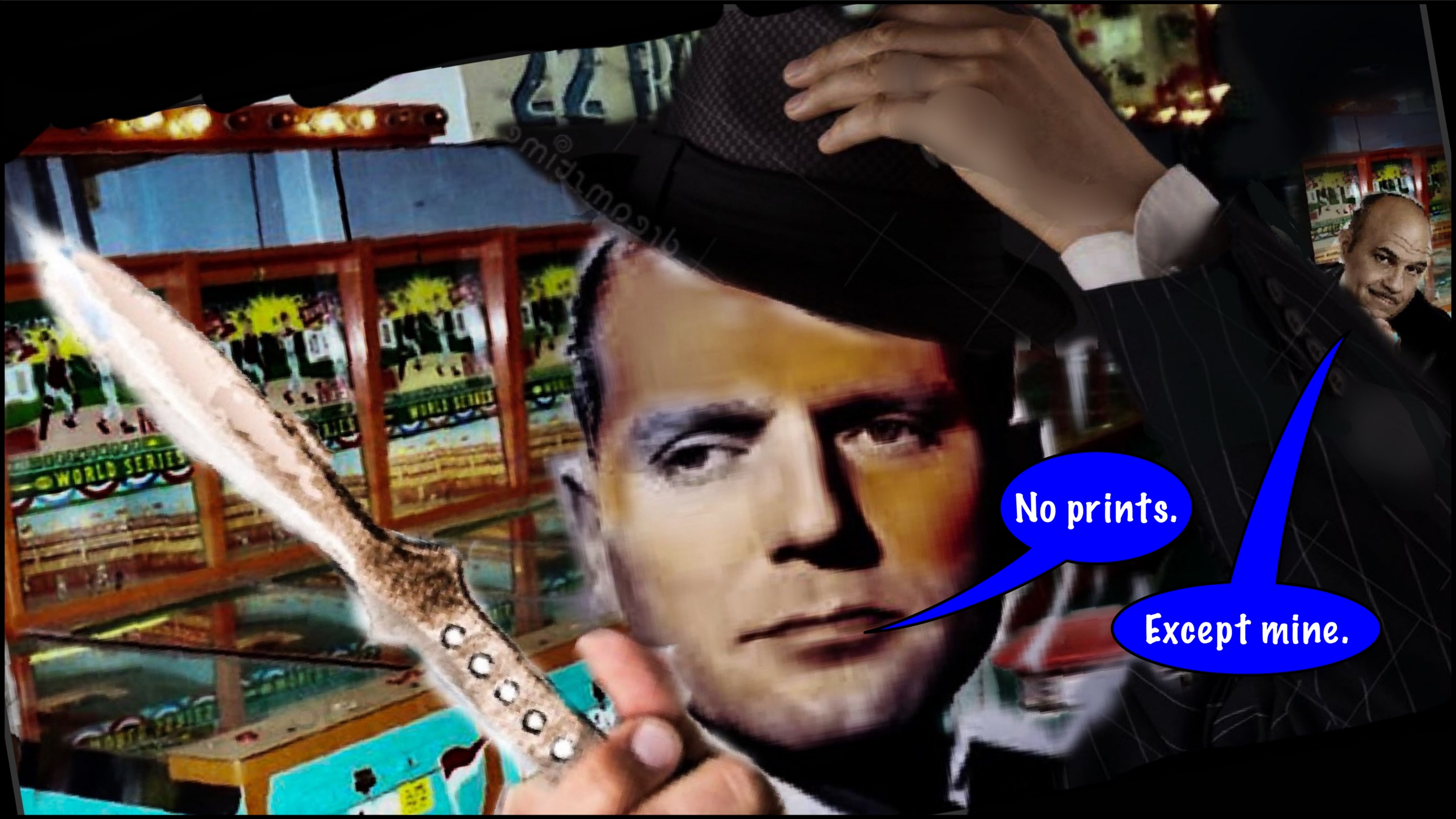

What was Jimmy Bentley doing out there at that time of the morning?
How do I know?
Maybe it's part of his job.


Lt. Ferris takes the knife from Sgt. Iturbi. It's one of May's.
Recognize it?
No.


You didn't notice it sticking out of Mr. Cochrane's chest?


I don't recognize it.


Ever see one like it?
Sure. Knife thrower's. Balanced.
Know who owns this partticular one?
They all look the same, so I couldn't say.


WORLD SERIES
No prints.
Except mine.


Lt. Ferris pretends to stab someone.
Like this?
Bates. Norman Bates.
Heh-heh.


No, I'd remember something like that.


WORLD SERIES
WORLD SERIES
I hope so, Thaxton, because withholding information makes our job harder and we hate that.



Gabby has set up a joint for Thax across from the Palace of Illusions, where...

Bill Duff spiels from his bally.



Duff gives Thax the evil eye.

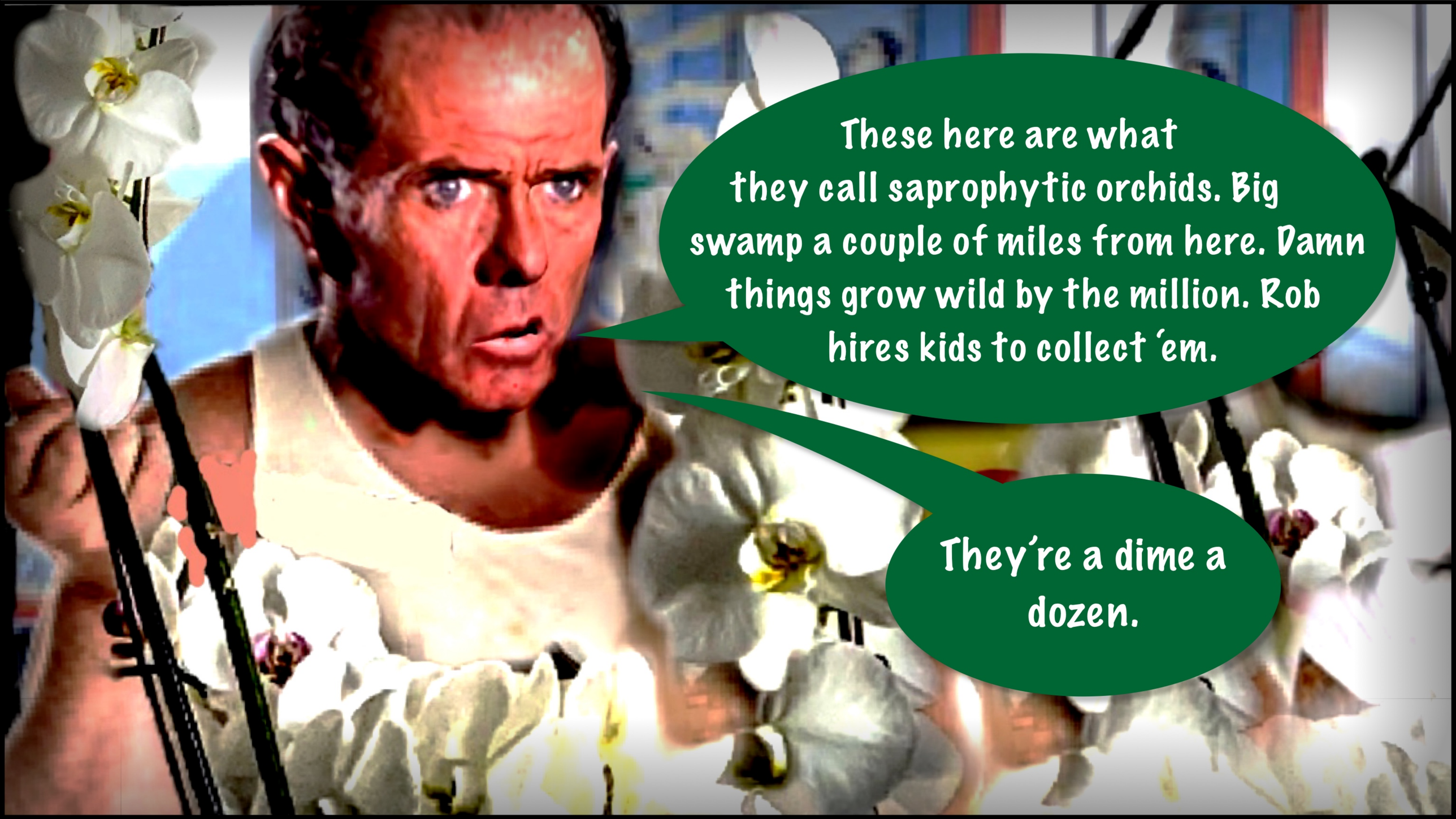


Thax gives it right back.




Gabby shows Thax around his joint.
What's with the flowers?


The boss don't allow for cash gambling. You let the marks win an orchid. You're just here for the atmosphere. Didn't Rob tell you that?
Yeah, sure. But a buck for an orchid?
PRIZES
GAME


These here are what they call saprophytic orchids. Big swamp a couple of miles from here. Damn things grow wild by the million. Rob hires kids to collect 'em.
They're a dime a dozen.


Just like spielers.
Huh?
Something Cochrane said to me last night.


I'm gonna miss the old bastard.
Seemed like a great guy. Who do you think did it?
Who do you think did it for Christ's sake?
Shit, I don't know. I just started here, remember.


Get off it Thax. I know all about you and May. Word gets around.
That's what everyone keeps telling me.


PALACE of ILLUSION
WORLDS STRANGEST PEOPLE
12 BIG ACTS
MAIN ENTRANCE
Duff's big mouth has been going, huh?


Did I say so?
You didn't have to.


You don't like
May much, do you?


Name me someone around here who does.
Cochrane must have liked her.


Rob was a pushover for her. You married her too. What did you find out?
I can't recall.
Let's just call it a mystery.
And everyone thinks she killed poor Rob.


Can't stop
people thinking.

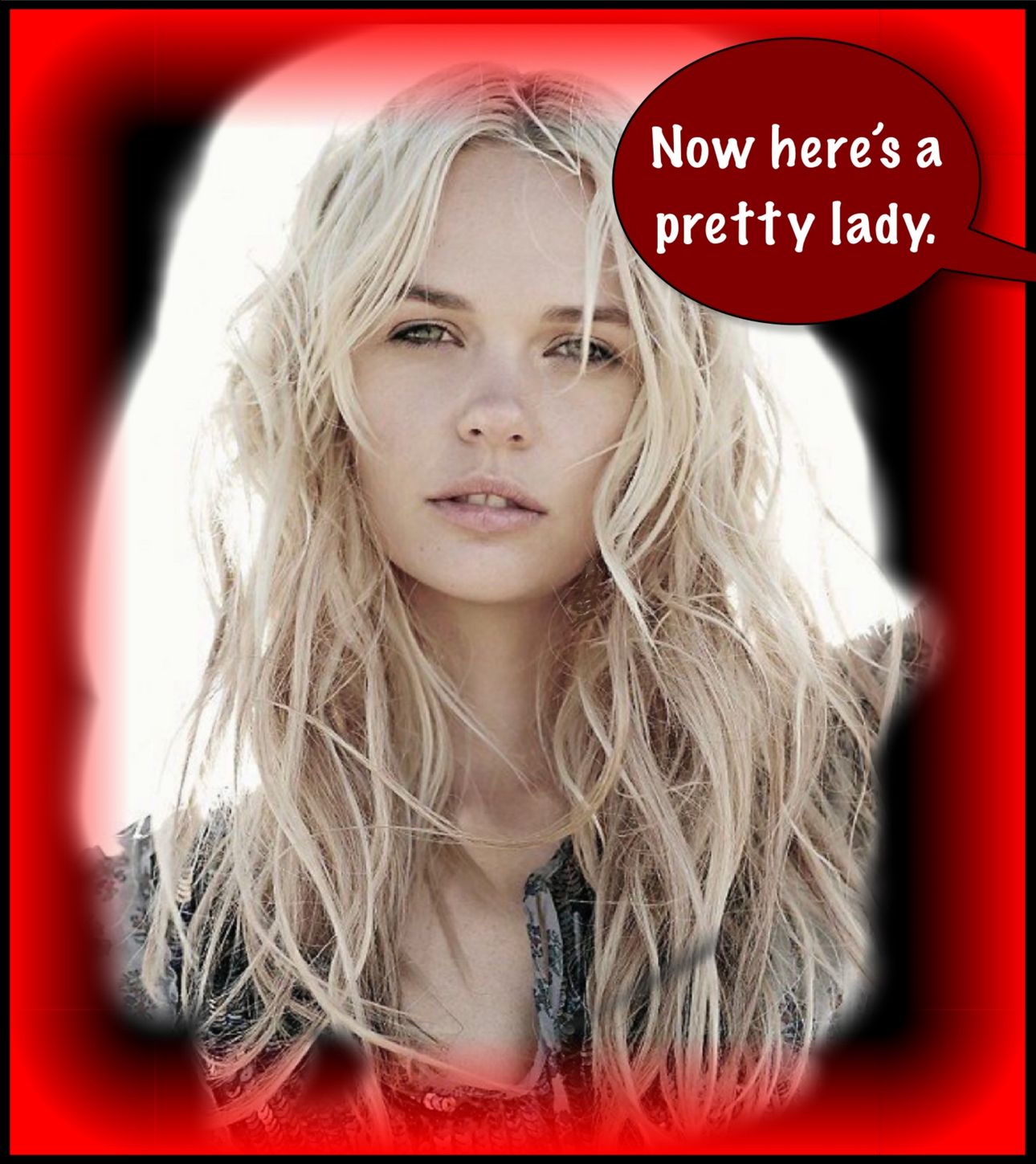


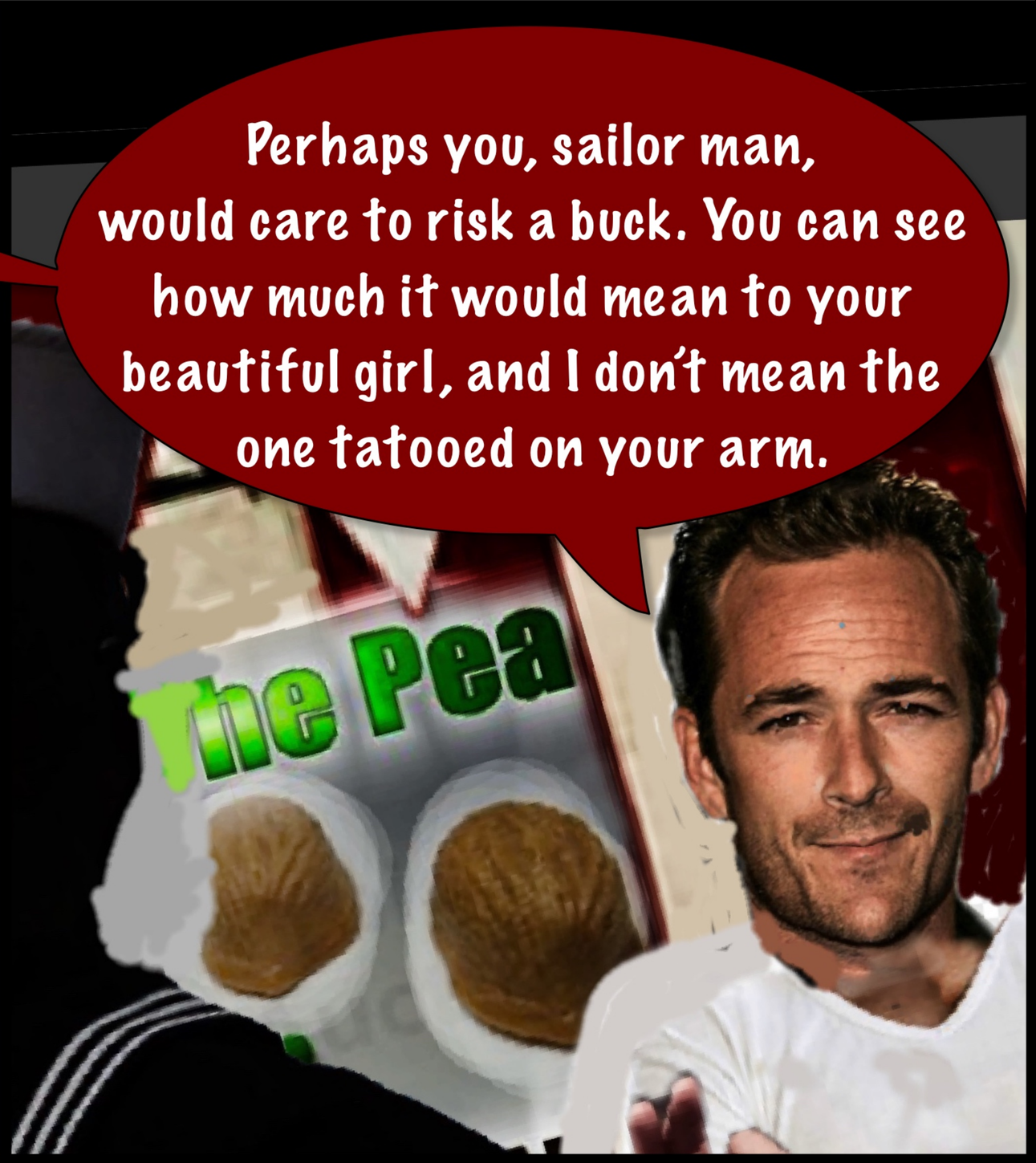
Thax's skilled hands rapidly manipulate three walnut shells and a little pea.


As the marks gather, Thax continues his spiel.
Here we go. Carnival croquet. Who'll risk a dollar to win an orchid?

A hot blonde with a sailor in tow steps up. She gives Thax the eye.




Now here's a pretty lady.


Perhaps you, sailor man, would care to risk a buck. You can see how much it would mean to your beautiful girl, and I don't mean the one tatooed on your arm.
The Pea


ISLAND TORTURE
SKELETON
E OF ILLUSION
ALIVE
Guy aboard ship taught me all about this. It's a game where you can't win.
He can't cheat if we both watch him close. C'mon Eddie, give him a dollar.

The sailor slaps down a dollar.



Step aside folks, let the sailor see the pea.






Thax covers the pea with the shell.

He does a slow figure eight pass.



The sailor taps the correct shell.







Thax palms the pea and turns over an empty shell.


Thax puts the dollar in his pocket.
Every now and then the gambler wins a little.


You palmed it.


Just like I said he would.

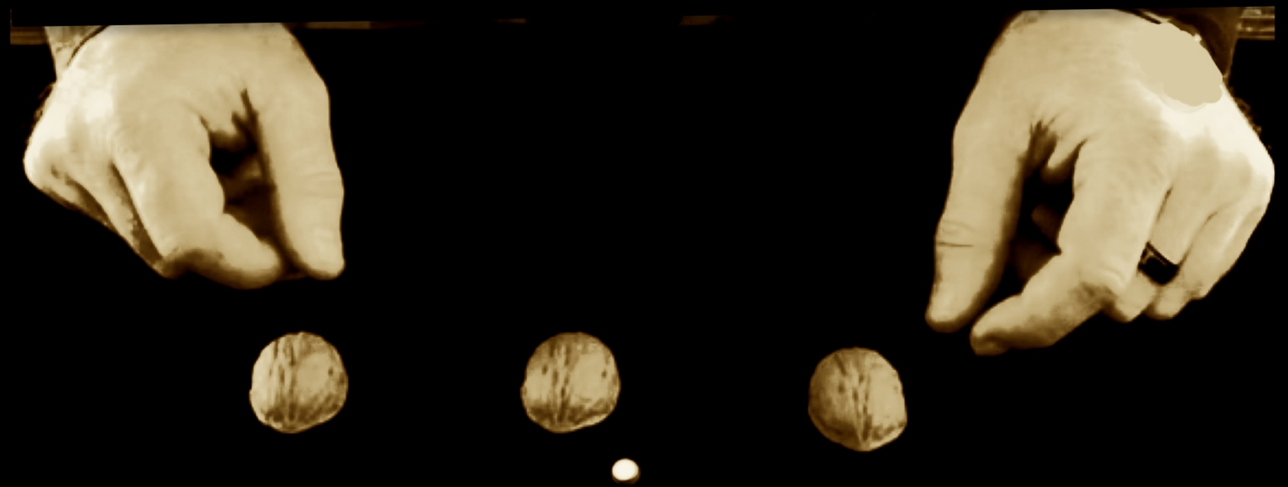

I want another shot!
You've forgotten something, haven't you matey?

The sailor tosses a twenty on the board.




Sorry, this is a one dollar game.
What's the matter? Ain't you got the balls?
OK sailor, let's call it an off the record side bet.

Thax shows him the pea.



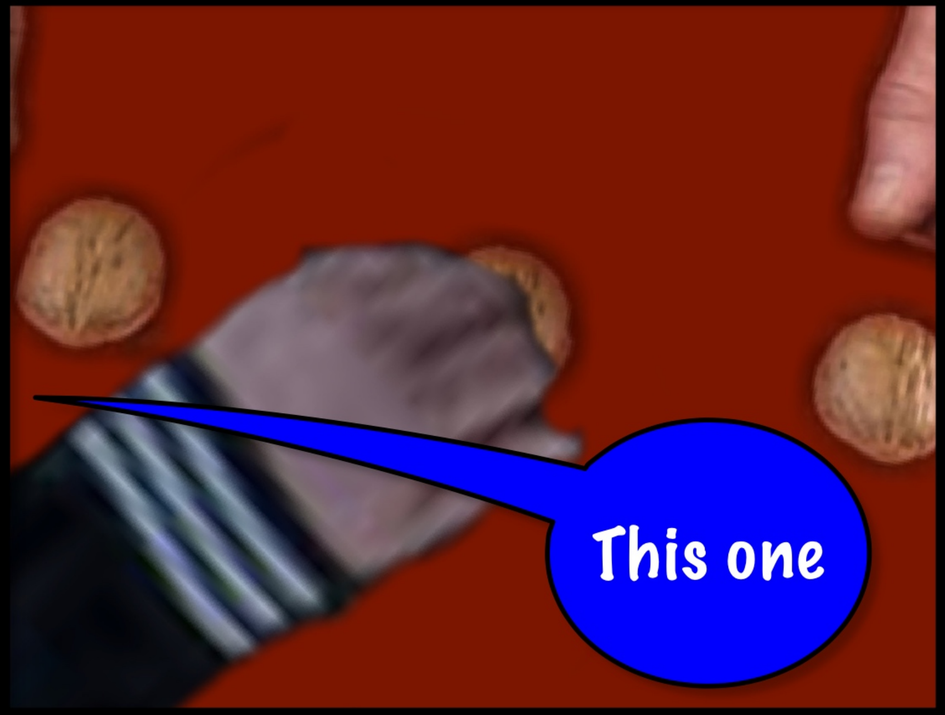


He covers it and makes a slow pass.

The sailor's eyes follow the pea.



The sailor covers the shell with his hand.




he Pea

The sailor then throws down another twenty.




I'll take that bet.
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN GOD WE TRUST
TWENTY DOLLARS

The sailor picks up the shell.





It's empty.

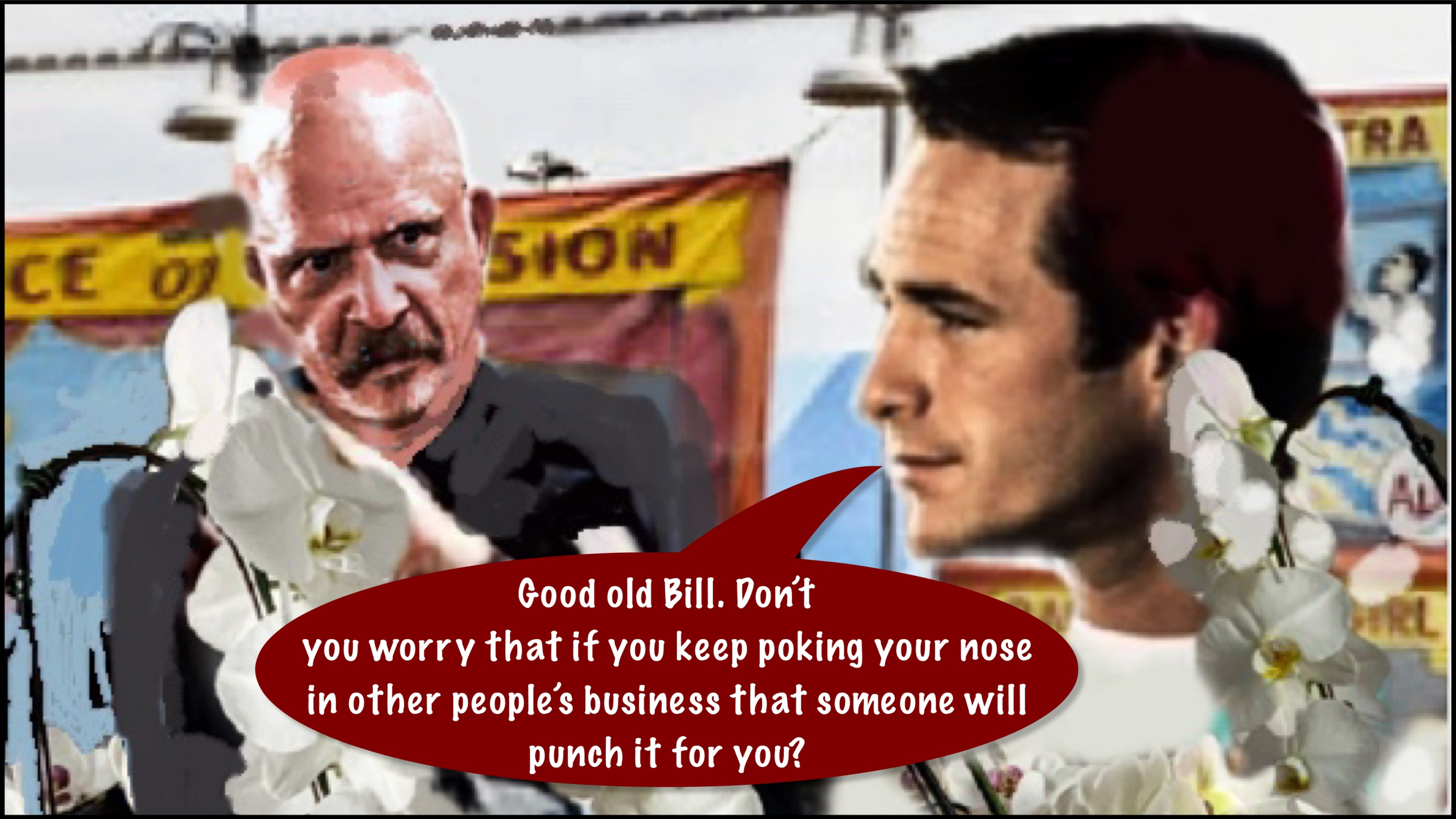

Thax grabs the Sailor's cash and turns back to the crowd.
A tough break for the sailor boy.
Who's next?
Who'll risk a dollar to win an orchid?


Thax hands an orchid to the sailor's girl.
Compliments of the management.



Bill Duff steps down from his bally.


He walks over to Thax's joint.
Do something for you, Bill?
Thax, that forty dollar rip you just pulled? That don't fly around here. You get caught, they'll fire your ass.


Good old Bill. Don't you worry that if you keep poking your nose in other people's business that someone will punch it for you?


I'm just telling you is all. That old time reaming don't go here. Old man Cochrane won't...
That was yesterday, Bill. Today all I have to do is tip May fifty percent of the take.


You never did understand May, Thax. You thought all she was after was the buck.
And what was she after, Bill? Besides the lump in your pants?
May had a tough life. But she's got her good side. She offered me a hand when I showed up here down on my luck.





Duff storms off.


Billie walks by. Thax spots her.
Hey Billie!
RADIUM SKIN GIRL


Billie stops, then walks over to Thax.
Did the police give you a hard time?
No.


Don't do that, Thax. There's people around.
Do what?


Stare at me like that. Oh, honestly, Thax, what's wrong with you?
I can dream, can't I?

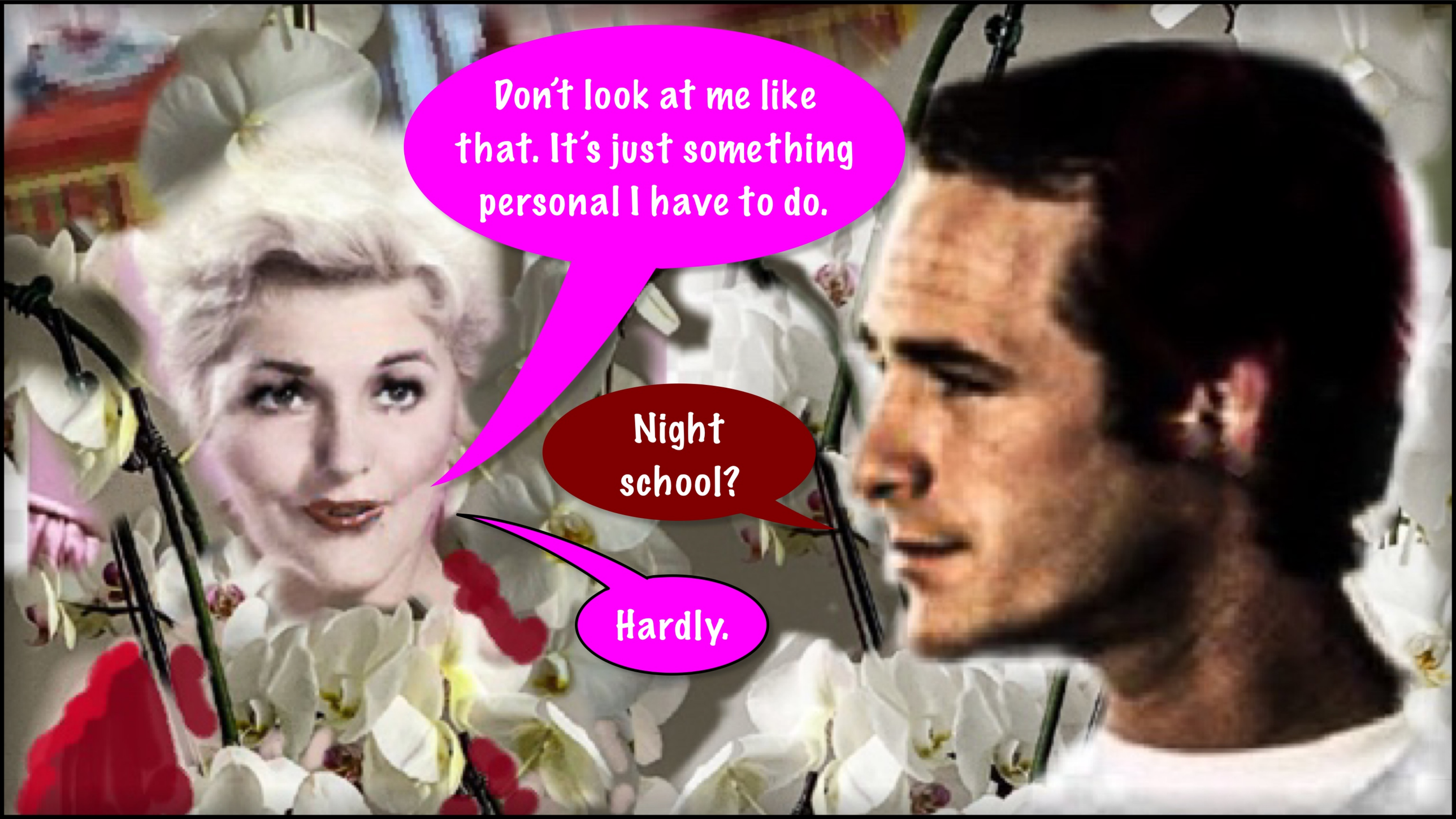

You going to work now?


Yes.


Meet me later?


I can't. Really. I've got plans for tonight.


Date?


Don't look at me like that. It's just something personal I have to do.
Night school?
Hardly.

Billie touches his hand.



Not mad? I mean about tonight?

Not as long as we can do it twice next time.


Just twice?

Later, as Thax lies smoking in the dark, Terry Orme, the Monkey Man, swings in through the window.




Orme slips out of his monkey suit. Thax lights a match.


There's a lantern under that bed.


Thax finds the lamp and lights it.
You want me to leave just say so.


Go, stay, it's
the same to me.


Thax walks over to Orme and extends his hand.
I'll stay.

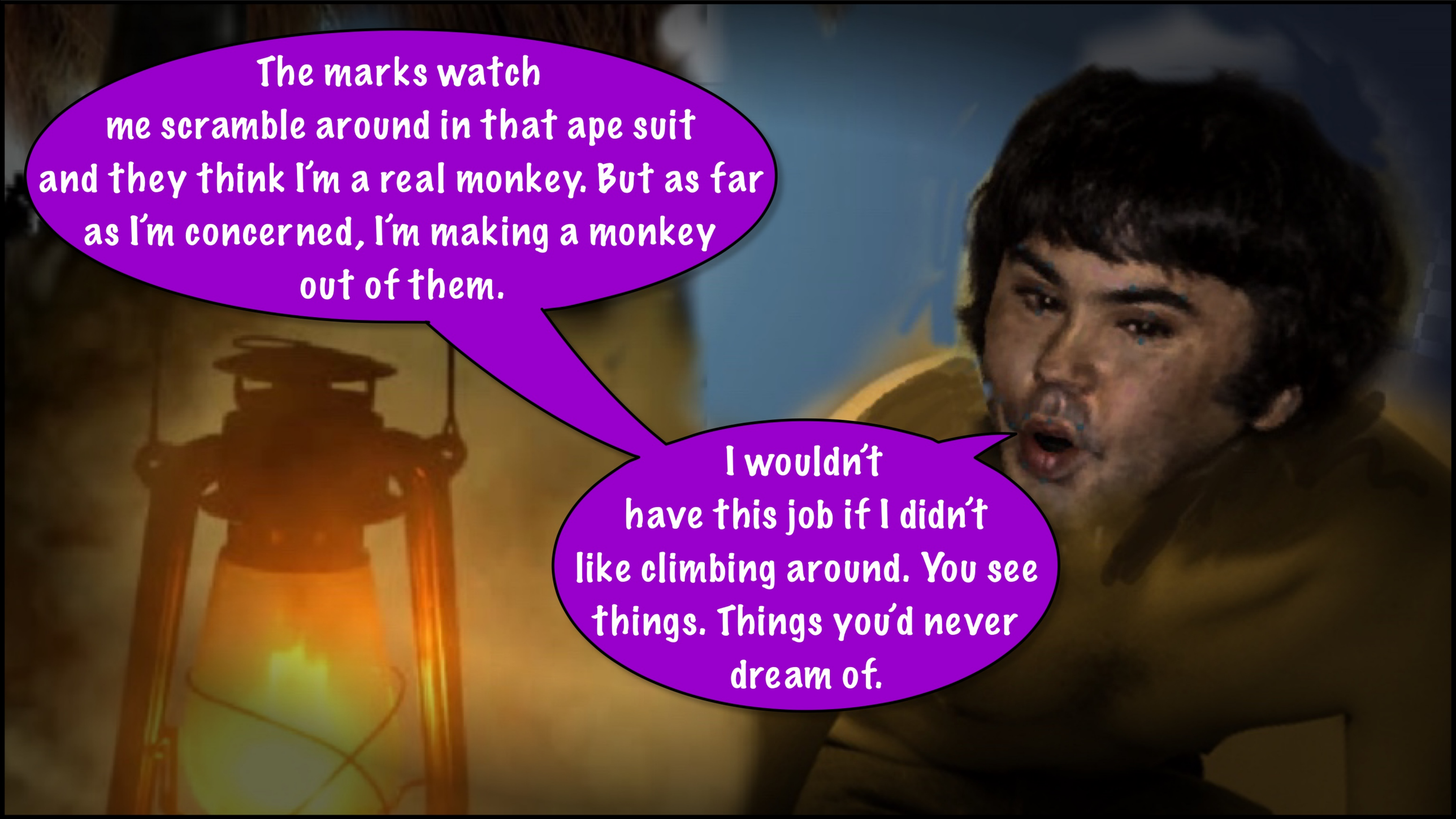

If we're going to be roommates, why not be friends?
I don't like to be touched.
Last chance.
Thax thrusts his hand closer.
So what's the big deal?


Orme reluctantly shakes hands.


I got enough dough I don't have to live up here if I don't want to.


I stay
by myself because I
don't like people, most of
them anyhow.


Same with me.

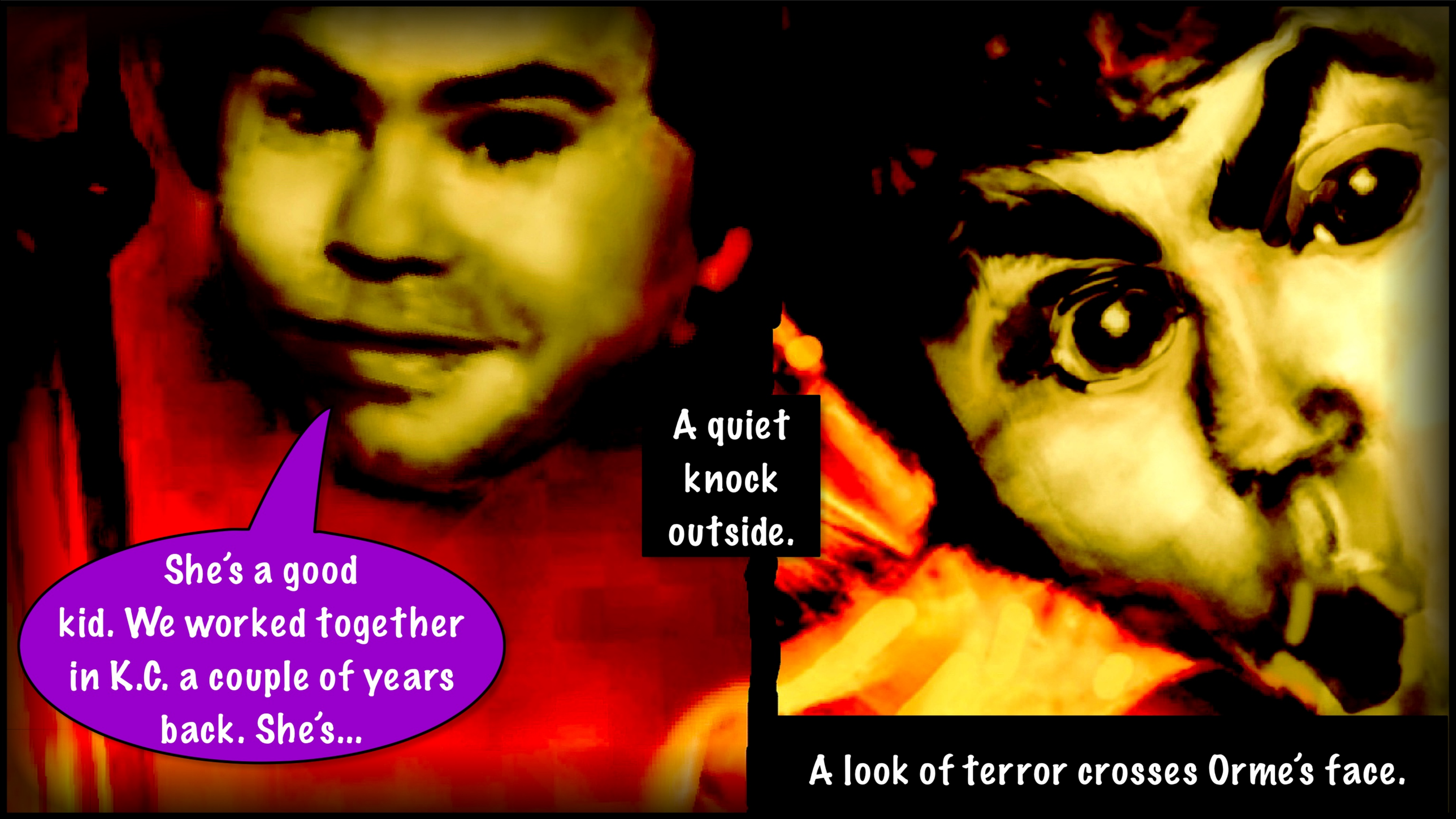

The marks watch me scramble around in that ape suit and they think I'm a real monkey. But as far as I'm concerned, I'm making a monkey out of them.
I wouldn't have this job if I didn't like climbing around. You see things. Things you'd never dream of.

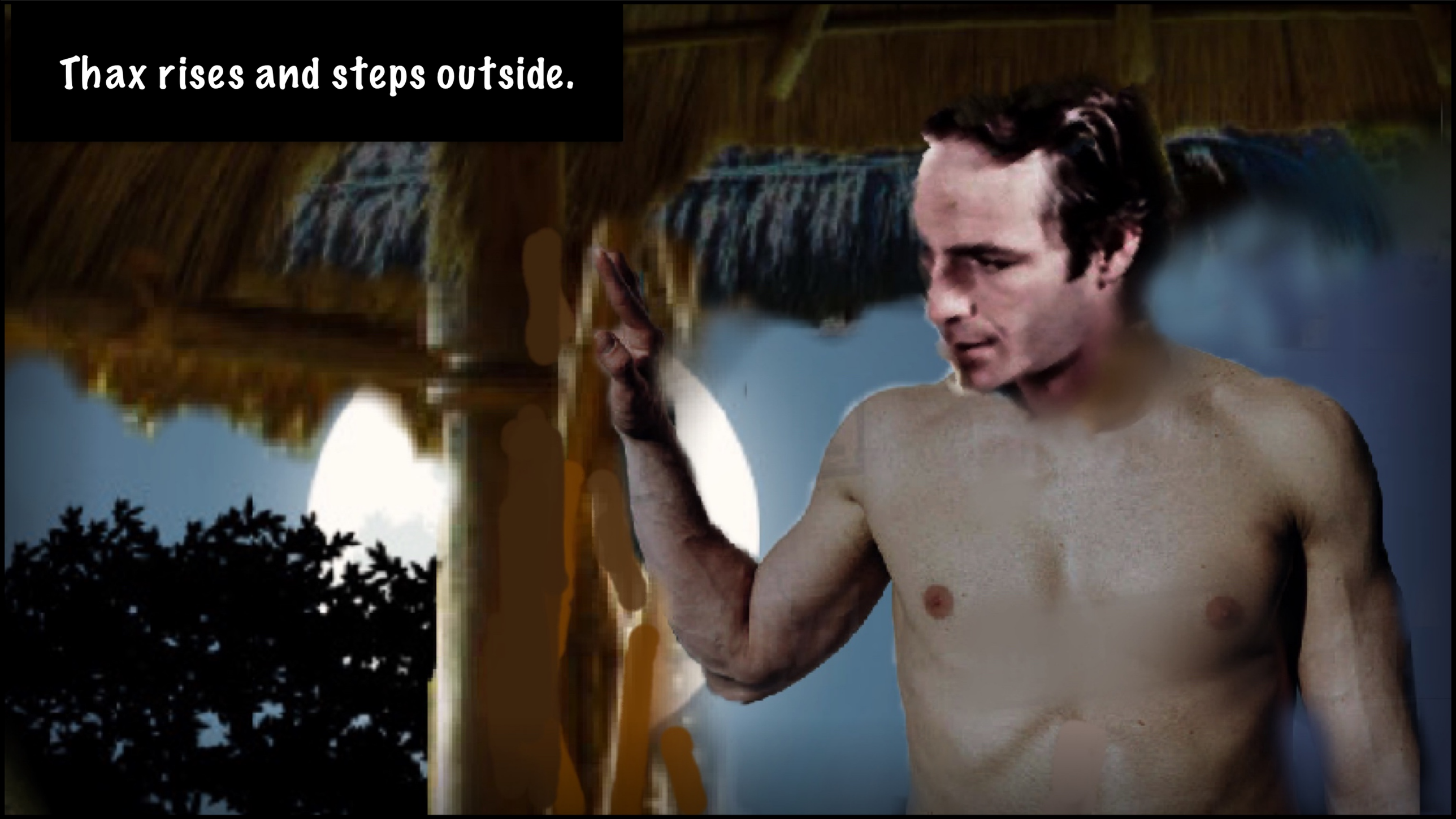

Orme spots a pile of books next to Thax's bed.
Guess you read a lot, huh?
Books are a man's best friend.
Who says that?
Me.
THE WORKS OF R.L. STEVENSON
KIDNAPPED CATRIONA - PART I
VOL. X.


You should meet Mike Ransome.
He read a lot?
Yeah.
What's Ransome's job?


But Orme isn't listening.
You making it with Billie?


Who's asking?


She's a good kid. We worked together in K.C. a couple of years back. She's...
A quiet knock outside.
A look of terror crosses Orme's face.


Thax rises and steps outside.

He looks down. A spotlight blazes over the deserted Swamp Ride.




Orme whispers from the shadows.
Who is it? A guy, or a girl?
Just a noise in the night, I guess. I don't see anyone.


Thax walks back into Tarzan's hut.
Orme has vanished.



A small rowboat lands on a sandy beach.


Thax steps onto Treasure Island then quotes Long John Silver.
"Ah, this here is a sweet spot for a lad to get ashore on."
TREASURE ISLAND

A sign points down a woody path.




Thax arrives at Flint's Treasure Pit.

At the bottom lies a half-buried sea chest.




depositphot
Thax gets a sneaky feeling.


A WILDMAN JUMPS UP!
"I'm poor Ben Gunn I am...
...and I haven't spoken with a Christian in three years."

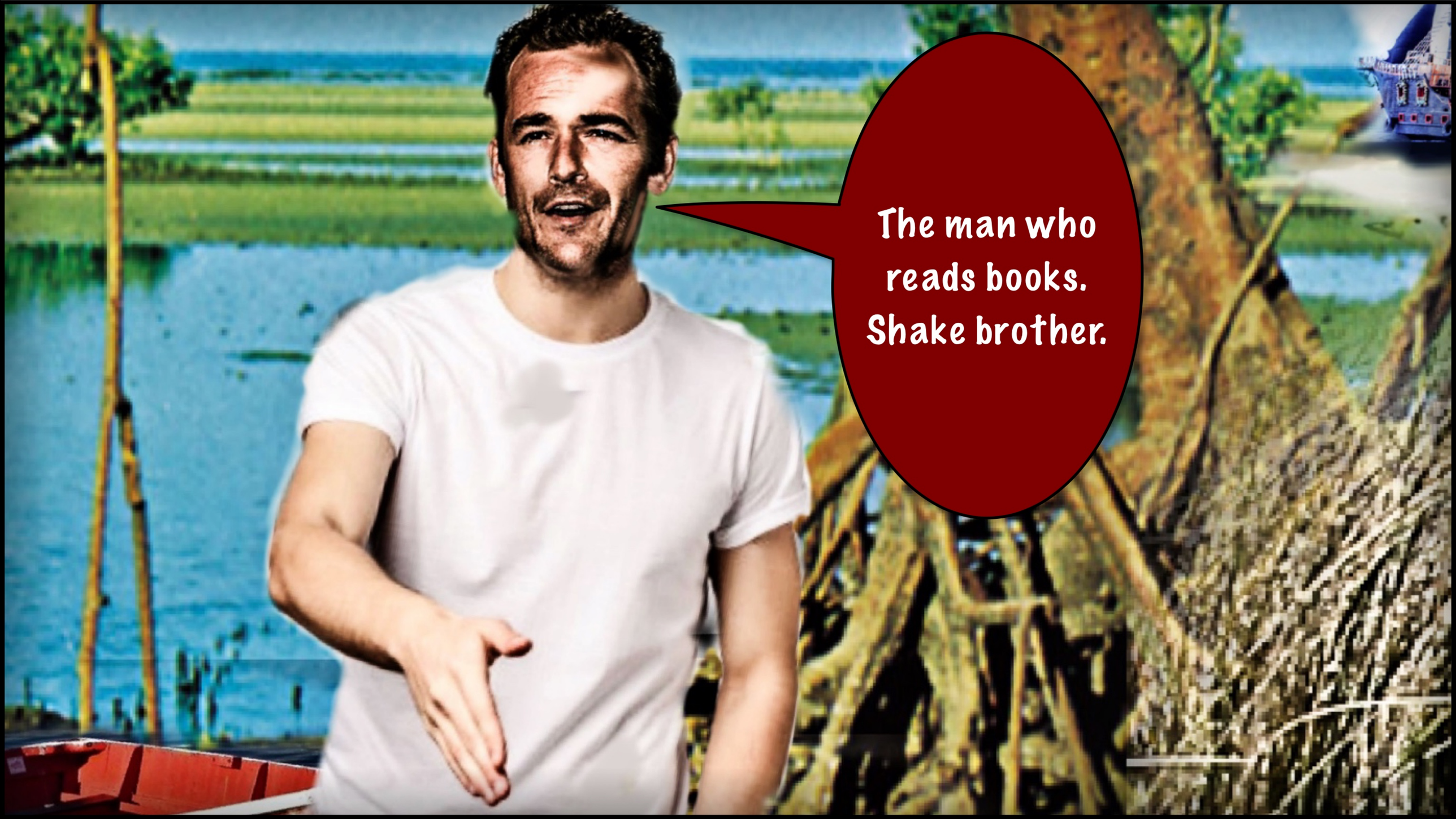

The Wildman peels off his beard and wig.
Scared you, huh?
It gets 'em all, especially the young chicks. I can make them leap halfway out of their panties.


I don't
wear panties.


You're Thaxton, aren't you? The new guy with the hots for Billie?


She's a good kid.
That's what Terry Orme said. Maybe I should start to wonder just how good Billie is.
You know Terry?
We're roomies up in the treehouse.


No kidding. I never knew Terry bunked up there.
He's not the only screwball around here.
I bunk aboard the Hispaniola myself.
By the way, my name's Mike Ransome.


The man who reads books. Shake brother.


C'mon, Thax.
I want you to see
my schooner.


It was all my idea. Old Man Cochrane let me design the whole layout.
We pick up the suckers over at the dock, and give 'em each a treasure map.
It doesn't bother the marks to dig in the hot sun for a chest full of Dreamland keychains and junk.



Ransome leads Thax aboard the Hispaniola.


They cross the deck...

...and climb through the hatch into the cabin below.



Thax surveys Ransome's home. Windows over the stern give a nice light. He spots some bookshelves in the corner.




TREASURE ISLAND
VOL. V.
THE WORKS OF R.L.STEVENSON
TREASURE ISLAND
THE WRECKER
MERRY MEN
DR. JEKYLL
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
DAVID BALFOUR
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
MERRY MEN
DR. JEKYLL
ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON
VOL. VII
THE MERRY MEN
DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE
PRINCE OTTO
SCRIBNERS
TREASURE ISLAND
ROBERT
THE LIFE OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
BY GRAHAM BALFOUR
VOLUME I.
THE LIFE OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
BY GRAHAM BALFOUR
VOLUME II.



Thax picks up a copy of "Treasure Island" and opens it.


Ransome puts a record on the hi-fi and heats a pot of coffee.
You know what I like about Stevenson?


The deserving always find what they're searching for...
...and live happily ever after. That's the way I like a story to end.
You serious?
TREASURE ISLAND
STEVENSON
VOL.VII
THE MERRY MEN
DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE
PRINCE OTTO
MERRY MEN
DR. JEKYLL
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
DAVID BALFOU

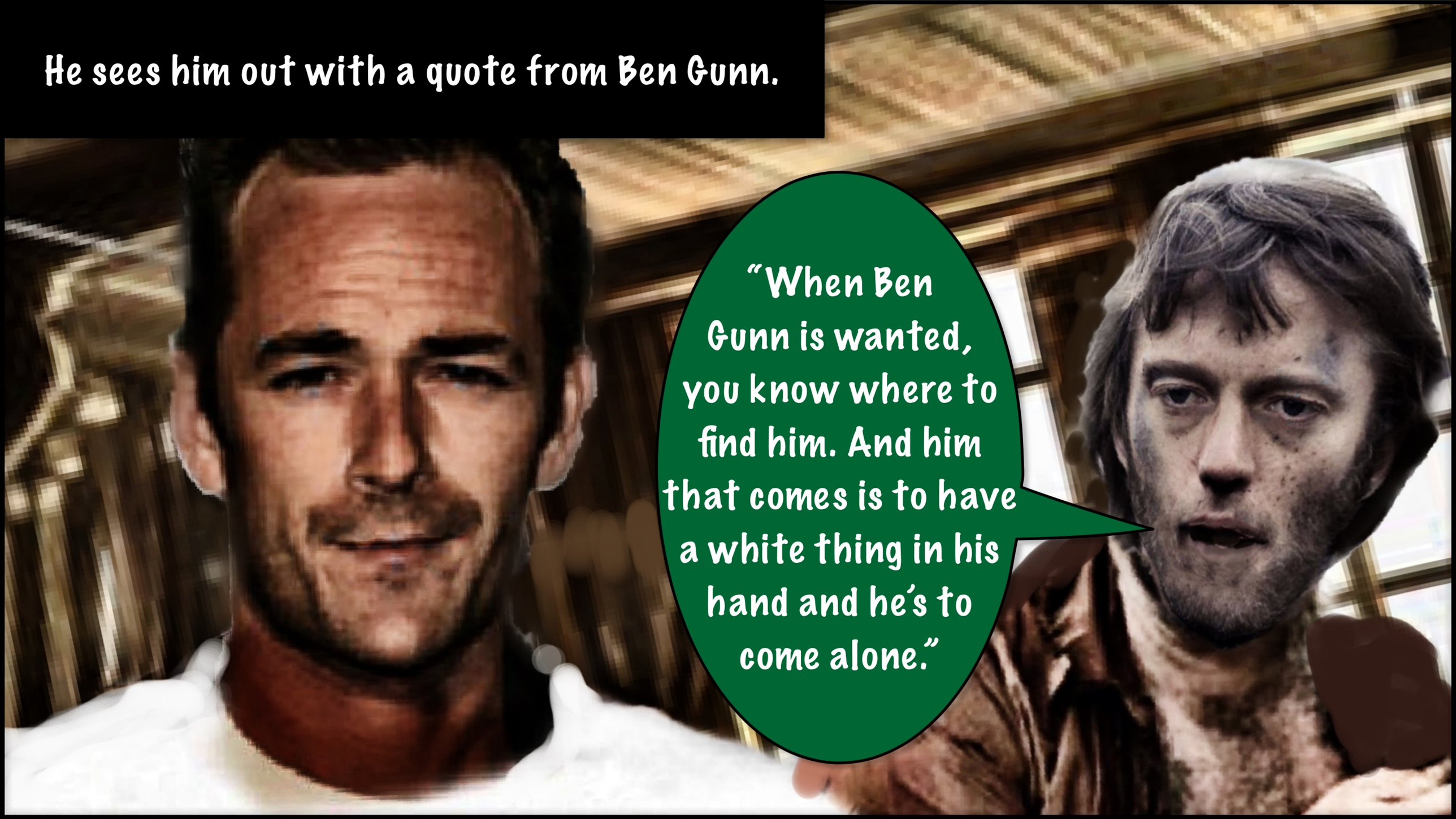

Kind of. Actually
I do believe you can put a certain spin on life. Make it come out the way you want. But it has nothing to do with being deserving.


Good luck.
Thanks. Coffee?
TREASURE ISLAND
PENTLAND EDITION


No thanks.
Gotta run. We got marks to fry.



Ransome nips Thax on the elbow, "Ben Gunn-style."


He sees him out with a quote from Ben Gunn.
"When Ben Gunn is wanted, you know where to find him. And him that comes is to have a white thing in his hand and he's to come alone."

As Thax opens his shell game, Iturbi, the cop, arrives.

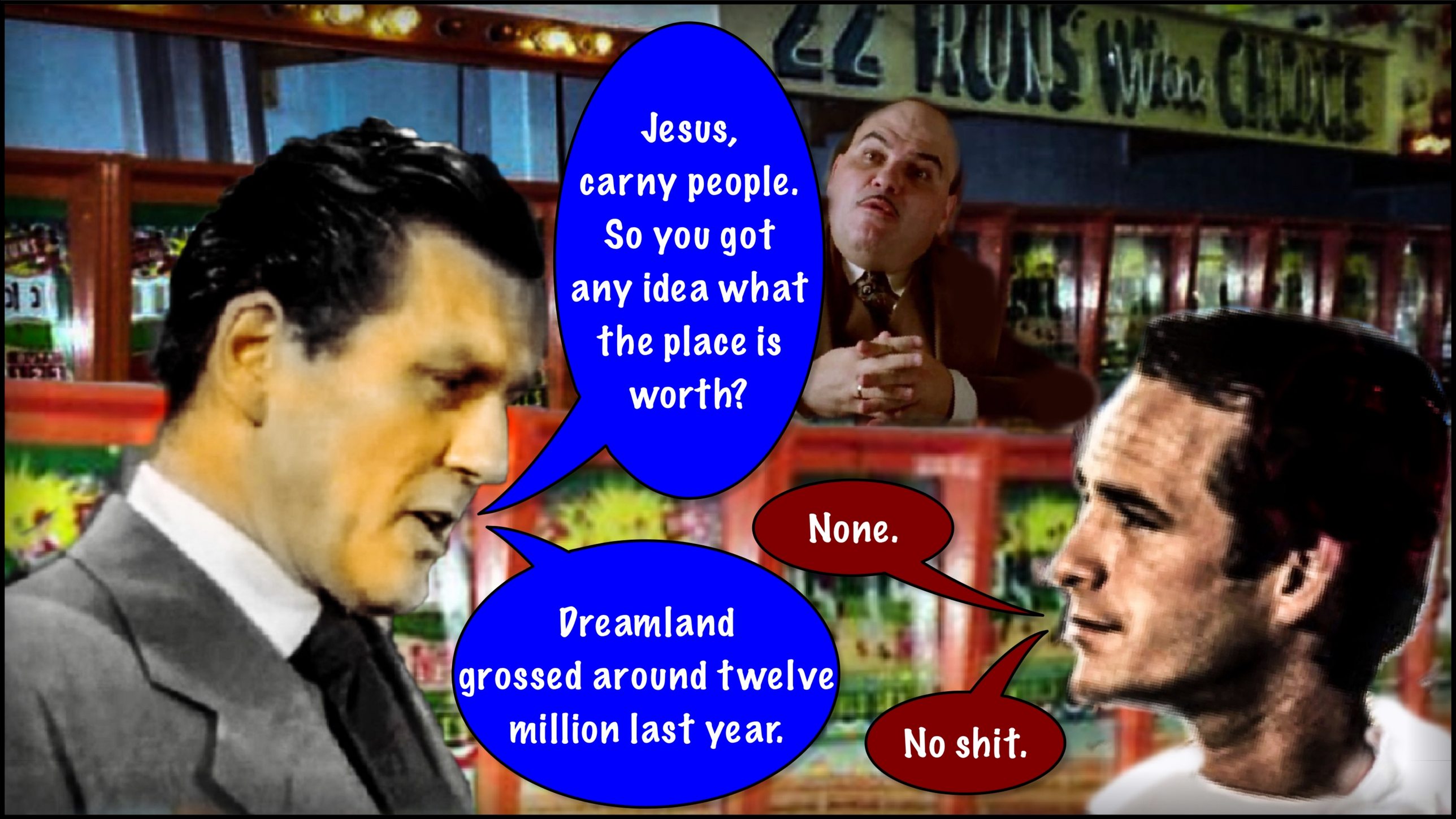



Bill Duff watches from his bally.
Let's go, asshole.


Lt. Ferris is waiting for Thax at the arcade.
We hate it.
I remember.
You remember the last time we talked, I cautioned you about making our job harder? I told you we didn't like that.


22 RUNS
Look,
Thaxton, you didn't
tell us that the victim's
wife who stands to inherit
this... theme park, is
your ex-wife.


BOWLING
JACKS OPEN
SKY JUMP
So?


Jesus, carny people. So you got any idea what the place is worth?
Dreamland grossed around twelve million last year.
None.
No shit.


You got anything you might want to volunteer? Help us out with the investigation?


I can't think of anything.


How about your ex-wife used to be a pro knife thrower.

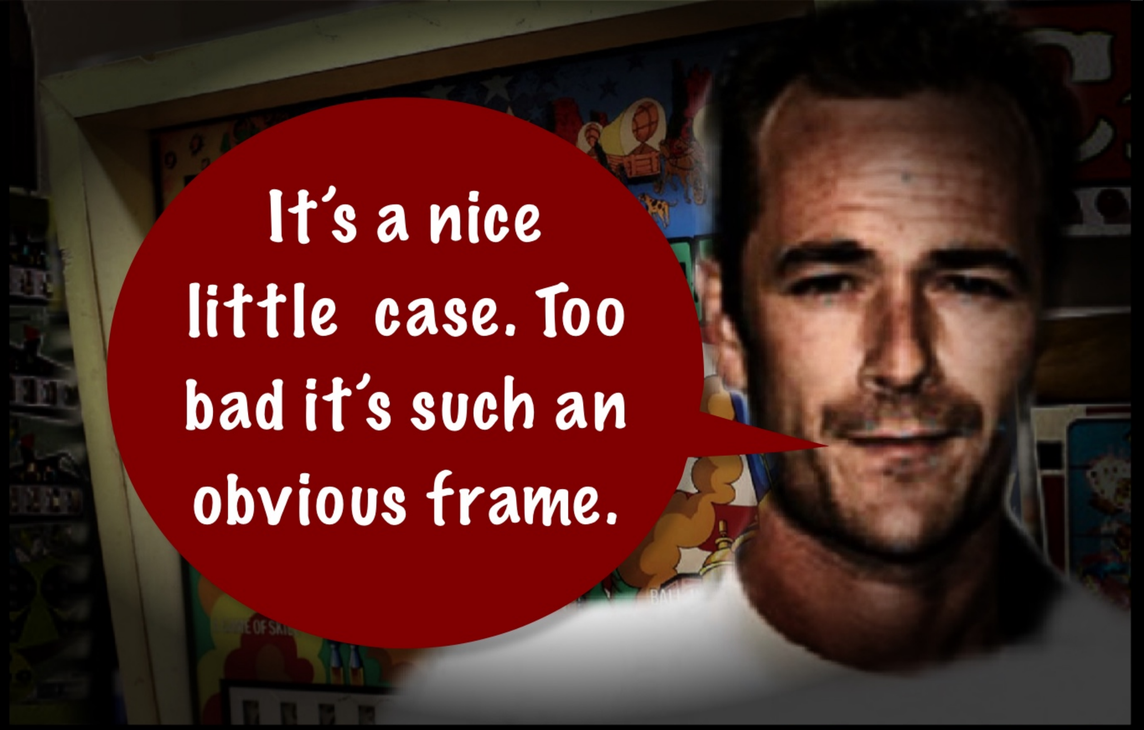

I thought you knew that.

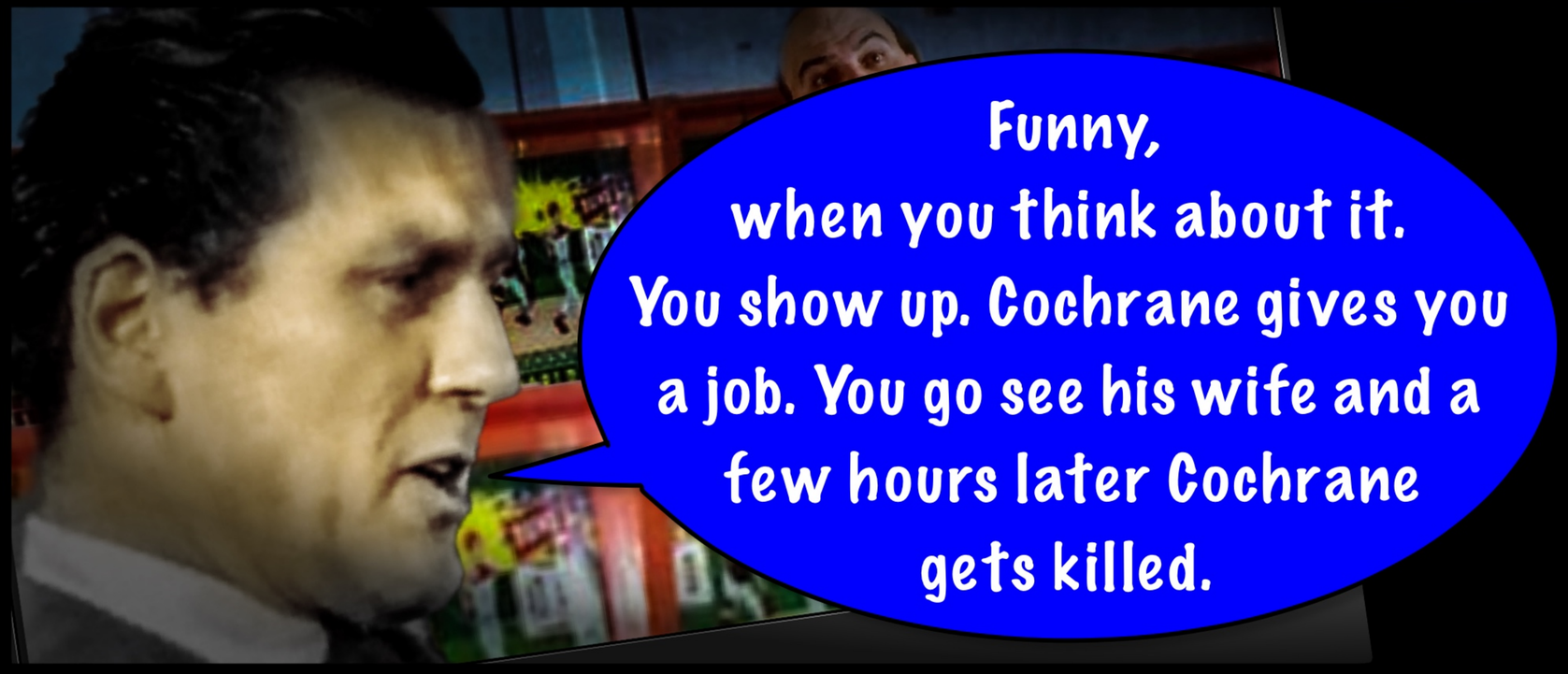

I did.


The point is, I want you to assume I don't and tell me things. Go ahead.
Yeah, go ahead.


You met with your ex-wife last night. What did you two talk about?
Not much. Said she didn't hate me anymore. Said she didn't give a damn about me anymore.
She didn't mention anything to you about you killing her husband?
No.


The knife
was hers. We found
an earring on the
mudbank by the body.
Hers, also.


It's a nice
little case. Too
bad it's such an
obvious frame.


Funny,
when you think about it.
You show up. Cochrane gives you
a job. You go see his wife and a
few hours later Cochrane
gets killed.


Will you
stop.


One more thing. Your ex-wife. Did Bill Duff used to screw her?


I suspect it was the other way around.


We heard stuff like that about her. Was that how it was between you two when you were married? She do stuff like that to you?


What does this have to do with the investigation of Cochrane's murder?
Nothing.
You can go.


Later.
Pardon me sir, are you Mr. Thaxton?


I am.


Mr. Franks has been looking for you, sir.
For me, why?
I wouldn't know. His office is over there, sir. Upstairs above the storerooms.

Billie exits Franks' office as Thax enters downstairs.




Just leaving?


OFFICE
Just quit. Gave my notice. I can't tell you about it now.


I'll tell you about it tonight. Can you meet me?
They meet halfway, he kisses her.


Tell me now.
Wait for me behind the kootch show. Tonight.

Franks pokes his head out the door at the top of stairs.




Billie's high heels go click-clack down the stairs
and out the door.


Franks pours Thax a drink.
Mr. Thaxton, I'm sorry if I seemed abrupt when we met.
I had a lot on my mind, what with Mr. Cochrane's death.


Is that to your liking?
Fine.

He Picks up the phone and dials.




Hello, May?


May enters
Franks' office.
NOVEMBER
JACK DANIEL'S
Tennessee


She wobbles over to the couch, a little bit drunk.
This is serious, Thax. Everybody thinks I murdered Rob. It's all over the lot.
JACK DANIEL'S
No.7


Every last bastard out there who takes my money is saying it.


May... now May.


RUSSELL INDEX COMPANY
1935 NOVEMBER 1935
Shut up, Lloyd. You can't deny it can you Thax?


You're a natural for it, May. Look at the motive.


Fuck that!

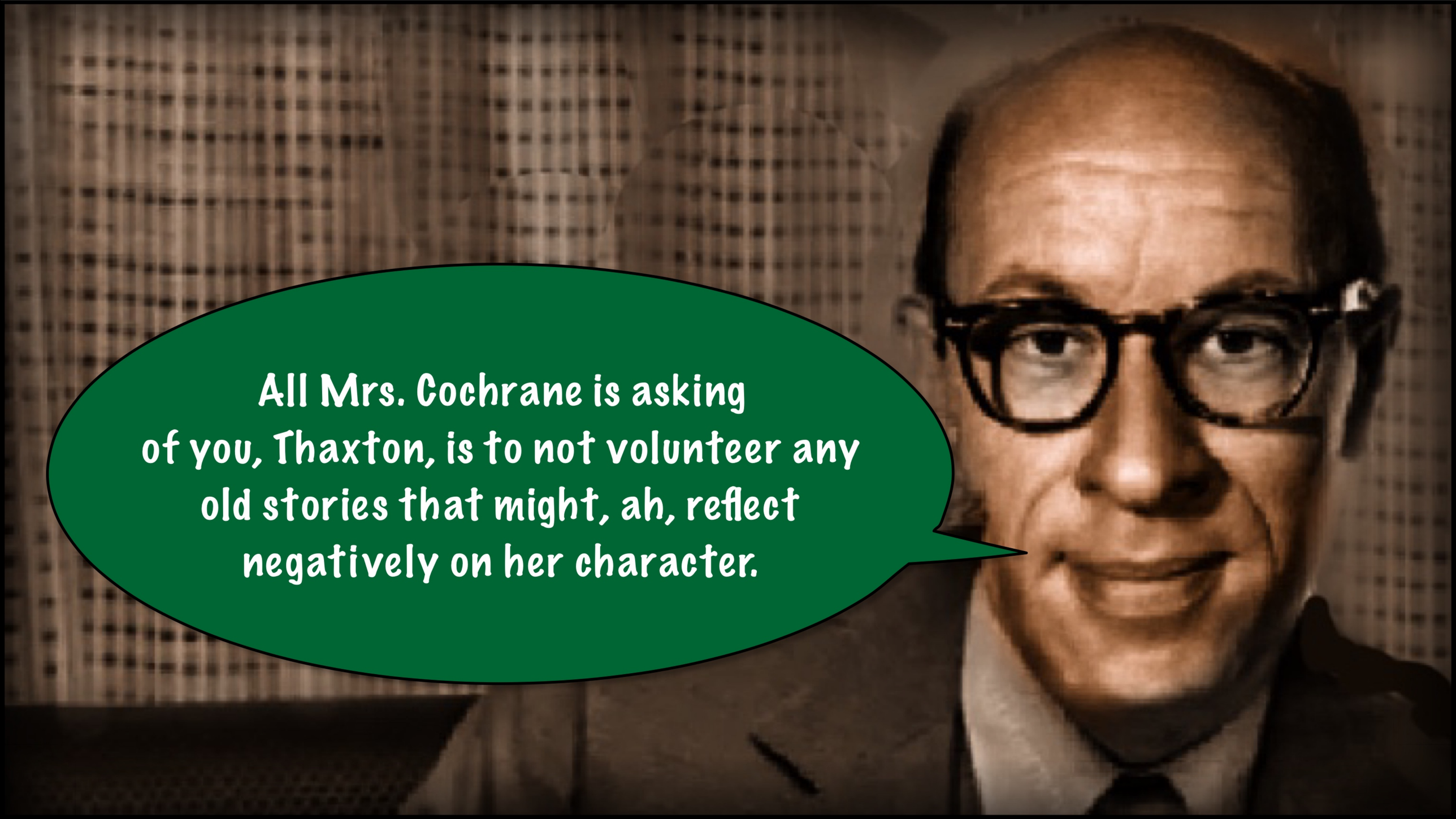

Rob gave me everything.
All I have now is grief.
My knife, my earring, my husband. I'm as good as convicted.


May... now May.



May turns to Thax.




All Mrs. Cochrane is asking
of you, Thaxton, is to not volunteer any
old stories that might, ah, reflect
negatively on her character.


Thax turns to May.
Like
that time you poked me in the
spleen with a throwing knife.
Stuff like that?
Just don't
add to my
problems,
Thax.


Whatever you want... you can have.


All I want is the money I earn on the lot. The police don't know about that time you stabbed me. Unless something goes wrong, I'll never mention it.


I'll see you two lovely people later.
Thax exits.


A ghostly fog hangs over the midway.
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDE
WORLD'S STRANGEST PEOPLE
12 BIG ACTS
WONDERS


Some young girls drift by, looking magically beautiful in the mist.


The distant sound of the Viking horn. Closing time.
Hhoooooooo-ooooooooooooh
PALACE of ILLUSION
WORLD'S STRANGEST PEOPLE
12 BIG ACTS

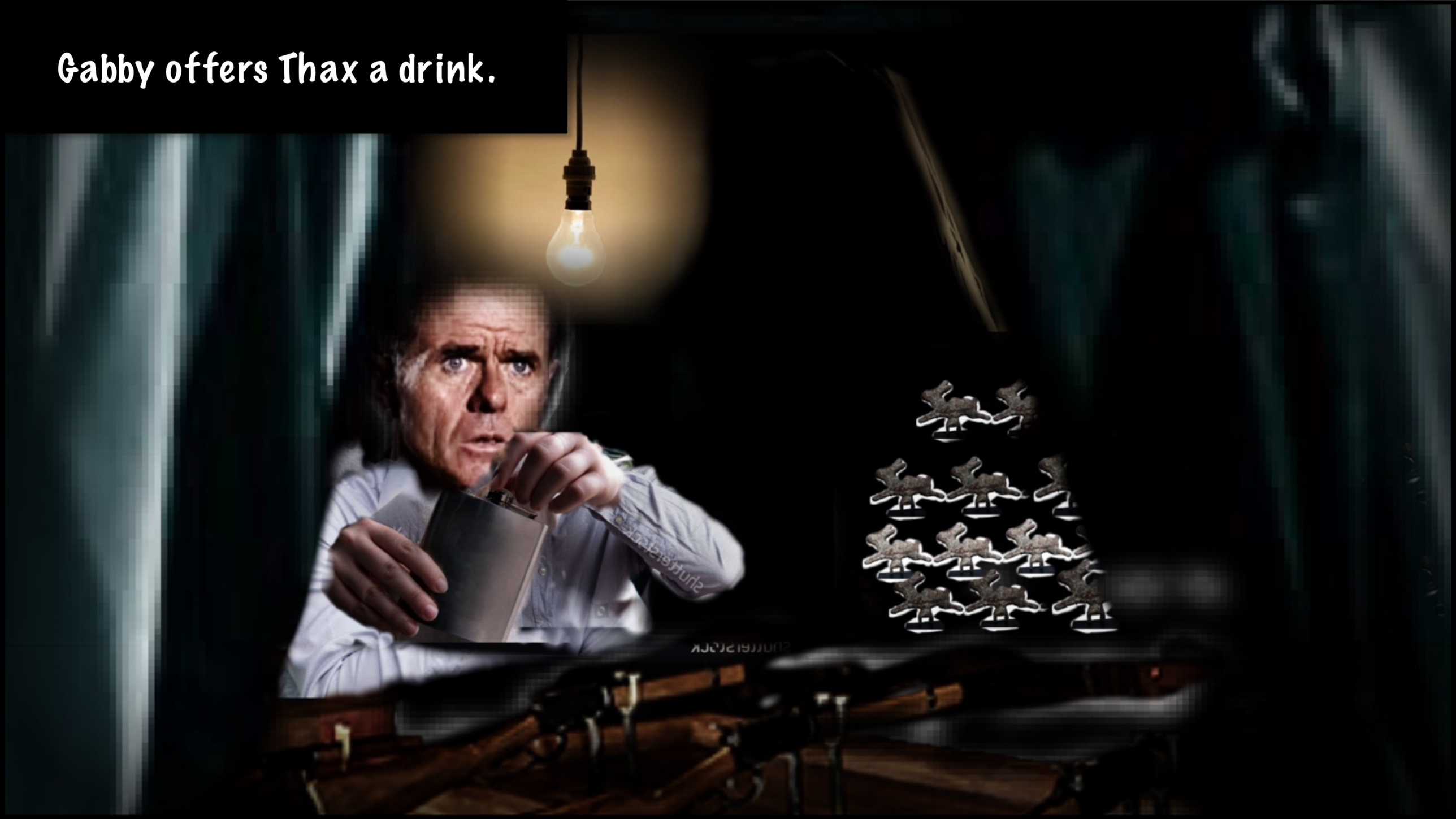
Thax closes up and walks over to Gabby's joint.



He enters through the tent flap.



Gabby offers Thax a drink.



He takes a pull and passes it back to Gabby.



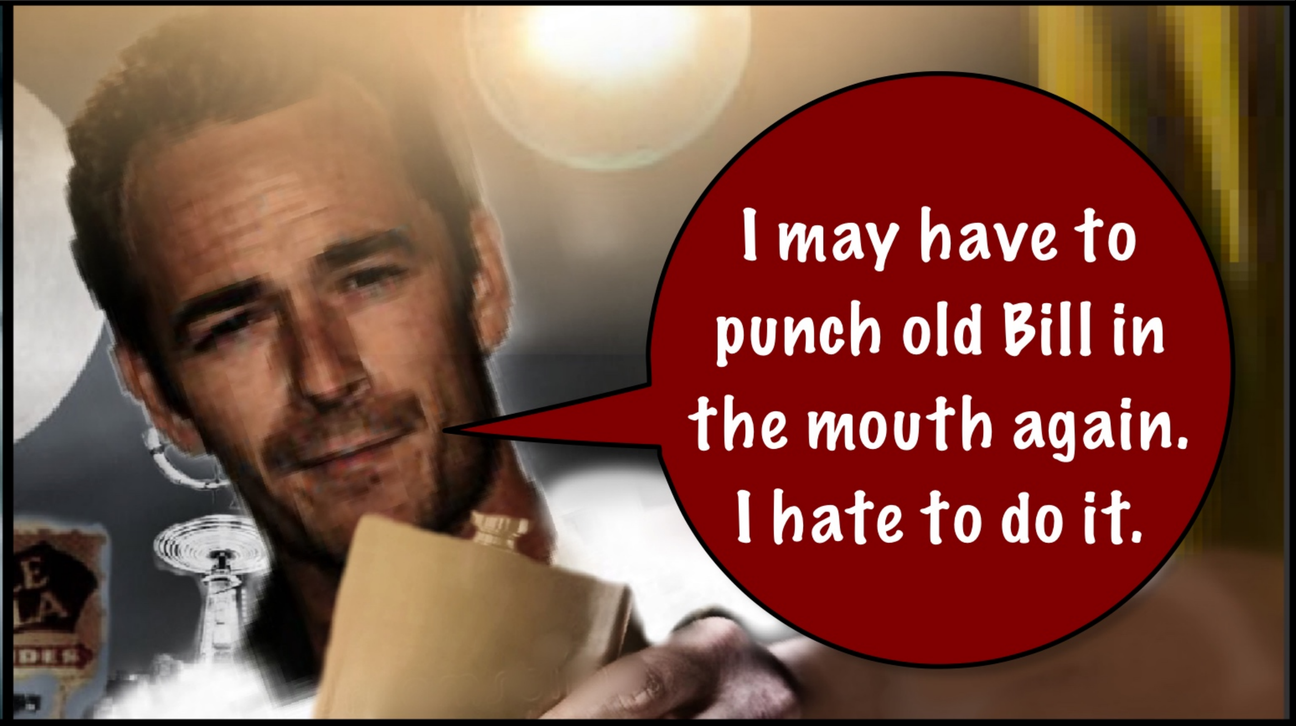


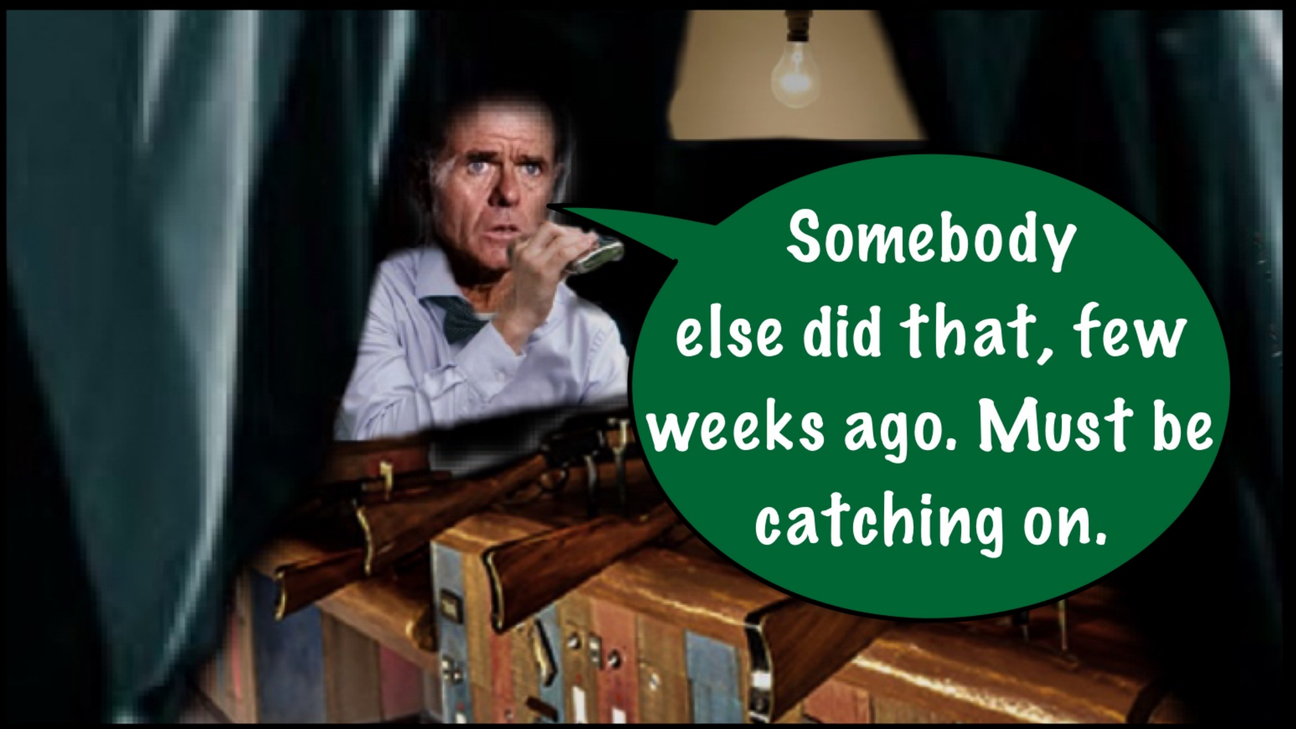
Gabby takes a long drink and wipes his mouth.


Got any ideas?
About what?
About the cops have switched their sights from May to you.
Where'd you hear that?
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES

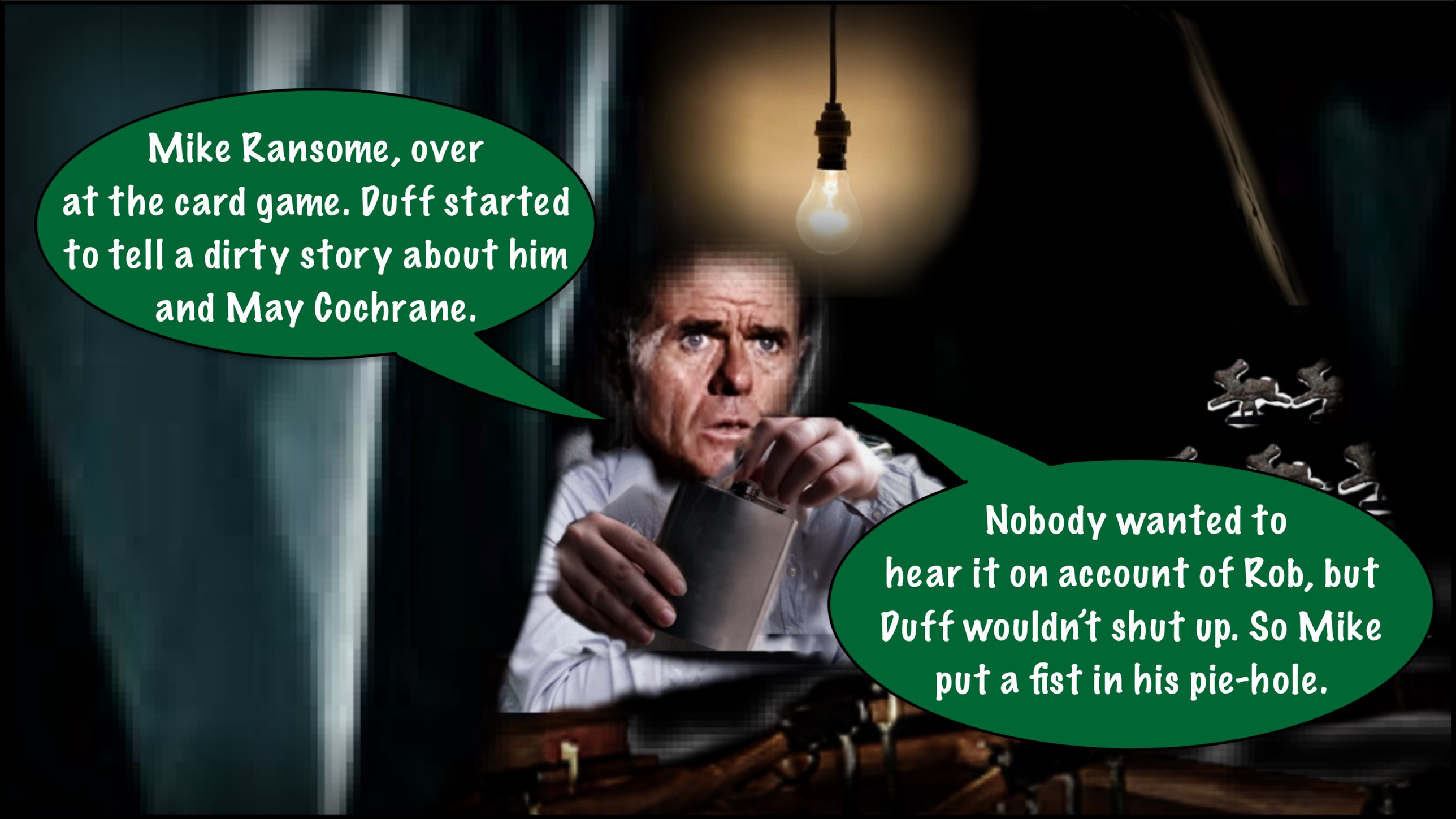

Word gets around
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
I know, I know, but who?


Bill Duff,
and it's straight
from Ferris.


I may have to
punch old Bill in
the mouth again.
I hate to do it.


Somebody
else did that, few
weeks ago. Must be
catching on.

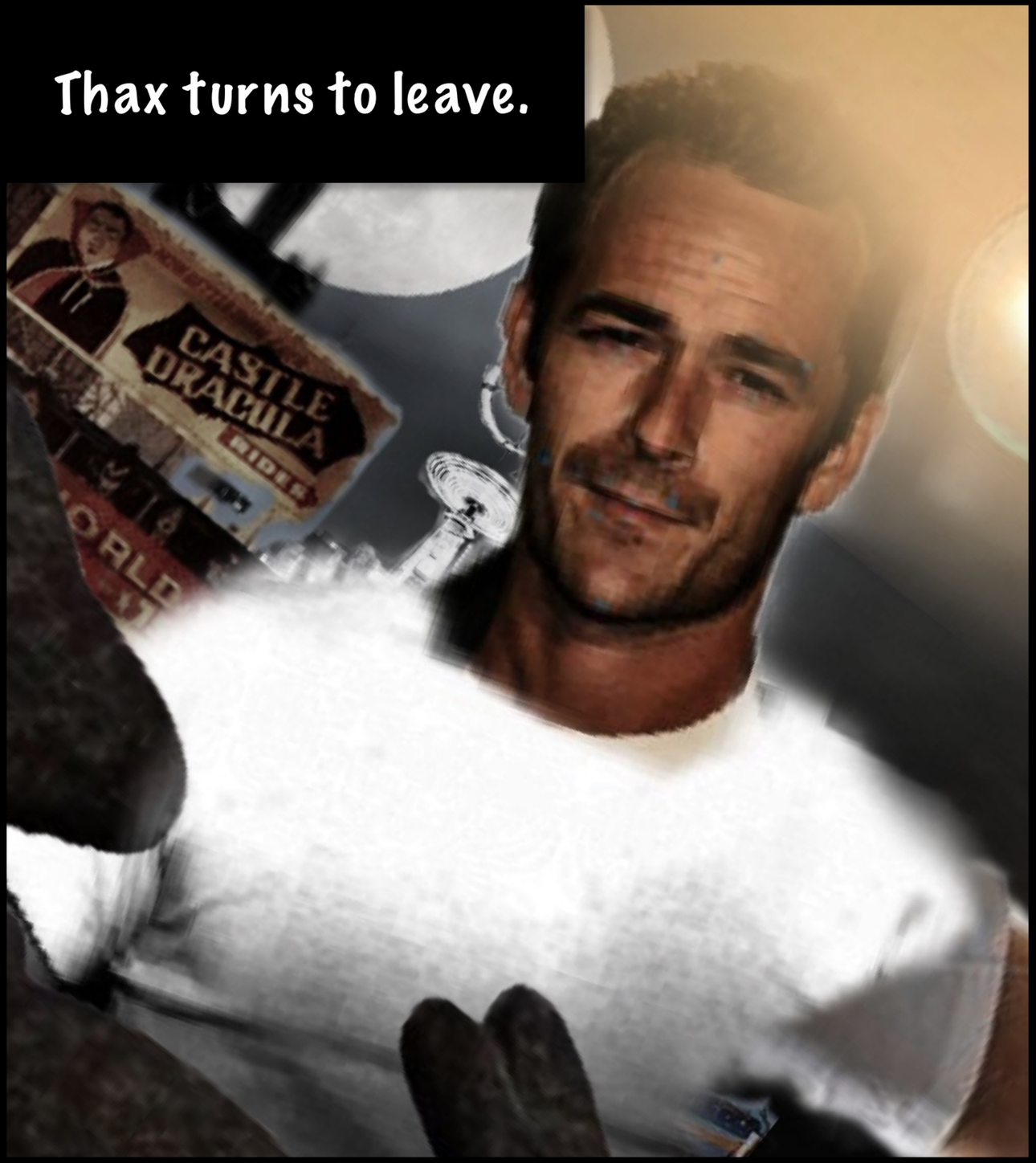

CASTLE
DRACULA
Sorry to
hear it.
Who?


Mike Ransome, over at the card game. Duff started to tell a dirty story about him and May Cochrane.
Nobody wanted to hear it on account of Rob, but Duff wouldn't shut up. So Mike put a fist in his pie-hole.

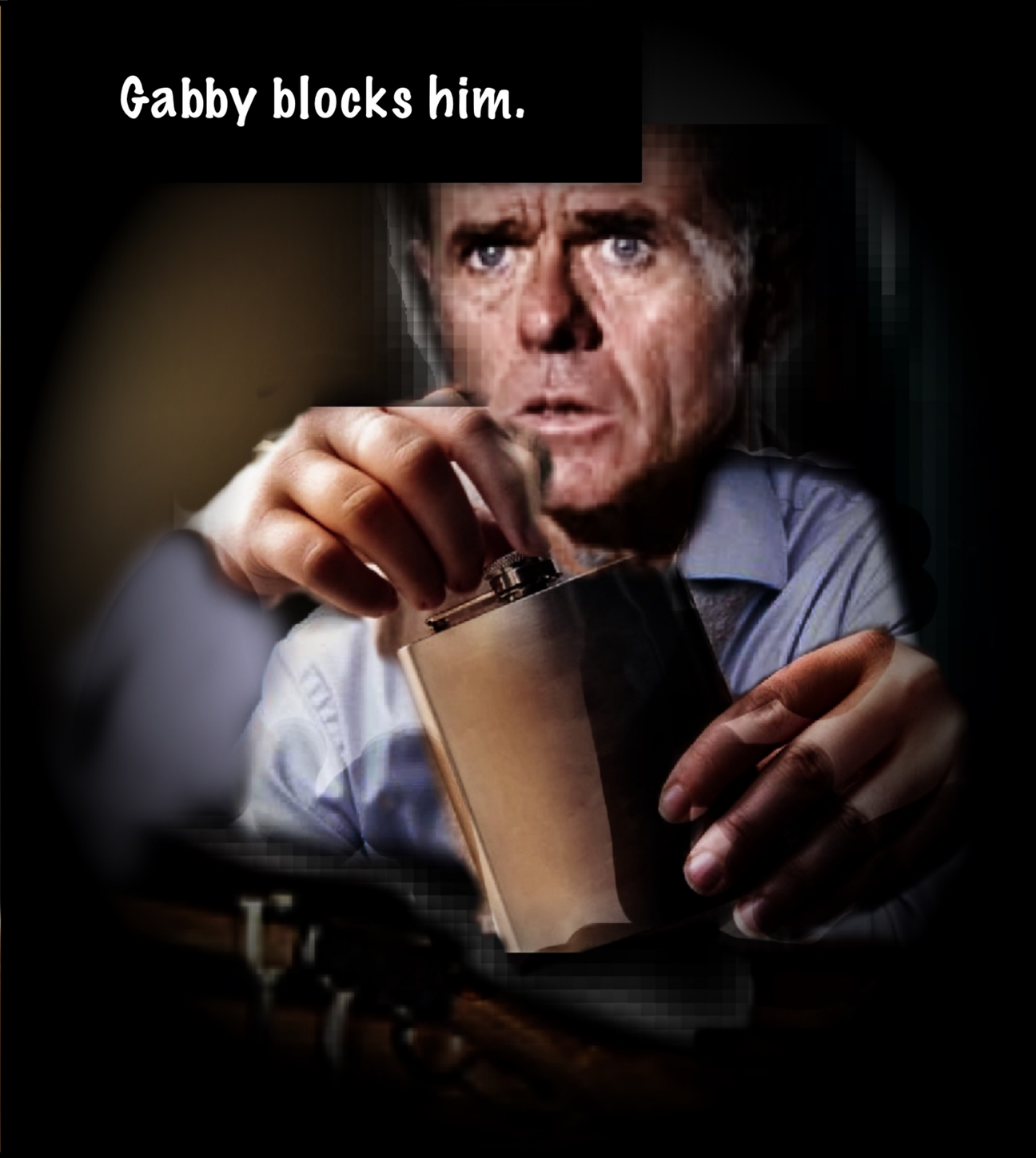

You should see him in action. He's fast.
Huh. I wouldn't have thought he was the type.
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
Where is this card game? I'd like to peek in sometime.


Dracula's Castle.
In the basement. But they won't let you within ten foot of a card table, the education your hands got.
I'd just like to watch.

Thax turns to leave.



Gabby blocks him.



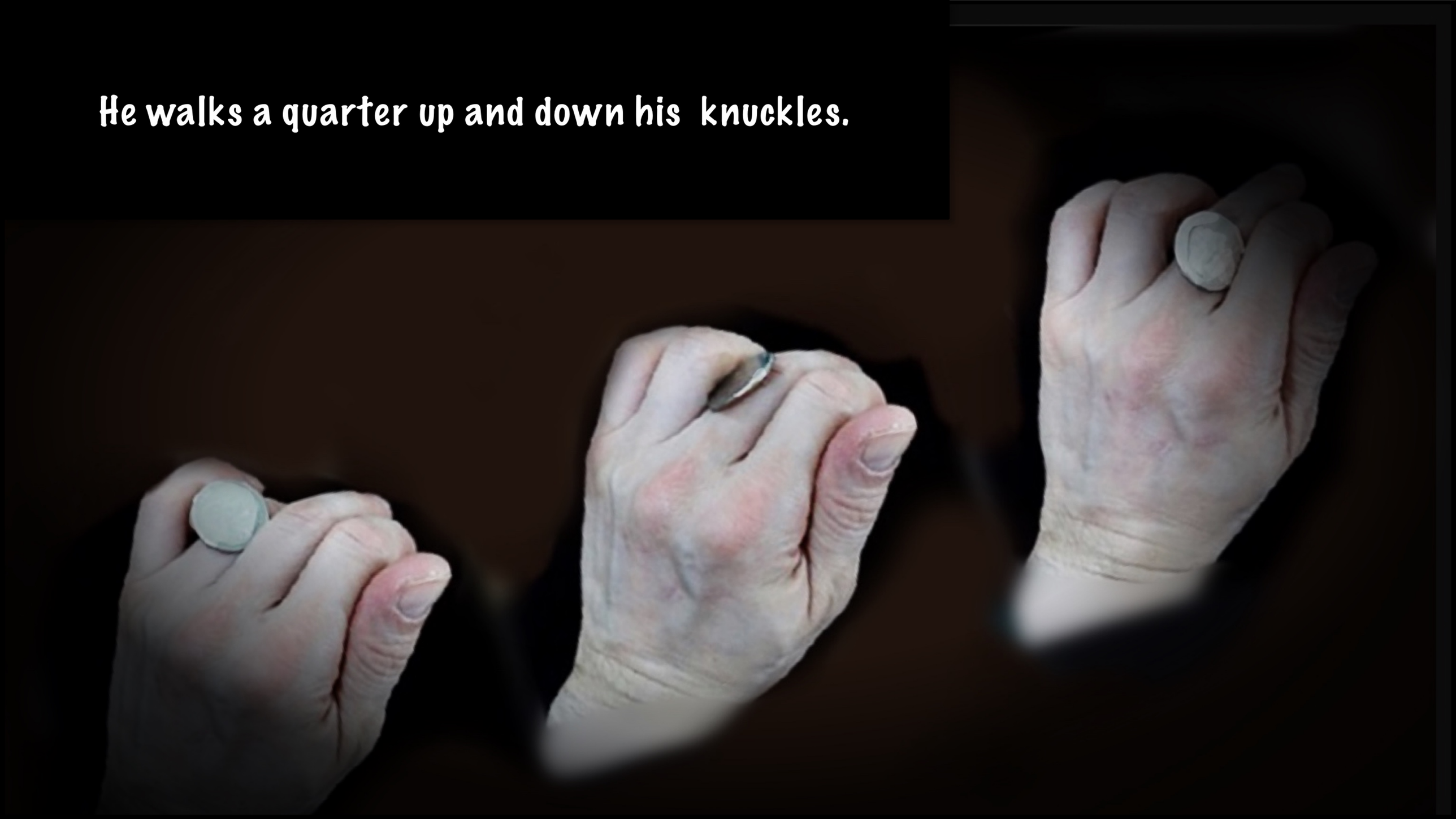

Thax, I ain't stupid you know.
What are you talking about?
If you get in too deep, maybe I can help you.
Speak English.


What I'm saying to you is, maybe you need a gun.
Thanks Gabby.
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES

Jerry entertains Bev, one of the kootch girls, behind the Palace of Illusions.



He walks a quarter up and down his knuckles.




Thax arrives.
Show Bev how a real pro works, Thax. Let's see you take her panties.
Is she wearing any?


See, he's good, Bev, he knew right away.
Jerry, stop being such a sleaze. You're embarassing me.

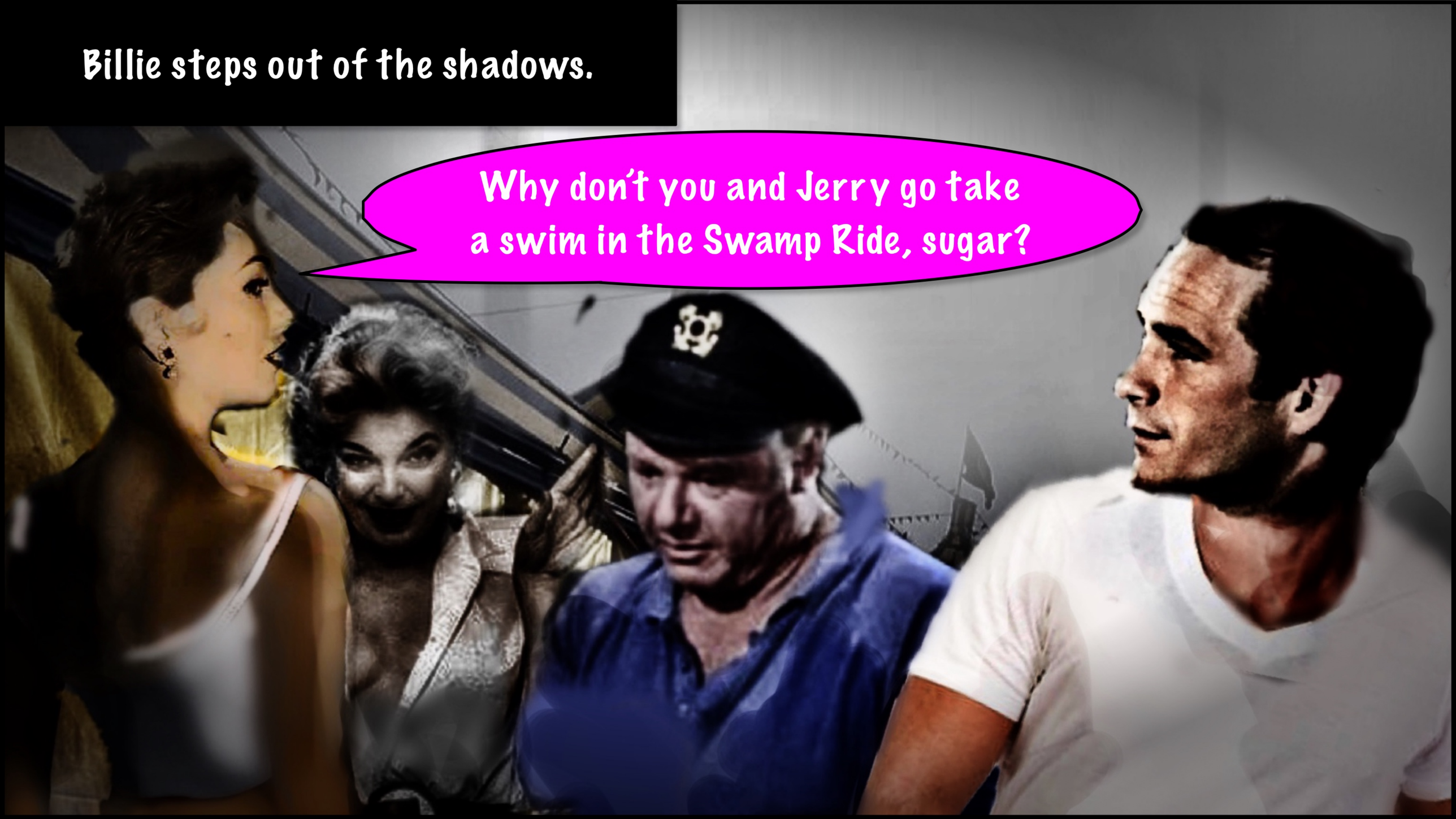


As Thax whispers in her ear, he slips the earring from her other ear.

Bev emits a little shriek of delight when he gives it back to her.



Billie steps out of the shadows.




Time to stroll, doll.


Billie takes Thax's arm.
Where we going?
C'mon. I'll show you.


The last marks file out and disappear into the mist.
CASTLE DRACULA
RIDES
WORLD
WAX

Billie and Thax arrive at Dracula's Castle.



Billie leads him up a corkscrew staircase.




No lights
up here yet.


She leads him to the bed.


They lie down together.
Thax, you used to have money, right?
Who told you that?


It's what people say.
I guess I did, til May cleaned me out.


You know how to handle money, don't you?
If I was all that good at it I'd probably still have some left.


Let's go away. We could go to the Mediterranean. I've always wanted to go there.
Are you nuts?


I've got money. Enough for both of us. You can manage it. You know, invest it in something.
It's time to move on. I want this part of my life to be over.


Where'd you get this money?
Saved it. I'm a thrifty girl.


Let's talk about it later.
Thax? Two weeks. Are you coming with me?


Oh yeah. I'm coming with you.


Later, Thax walks Billie
out to the parking lot.
ENTRANCE



The two guards from the swamp ride pull up and shine a spotlight on them.


What's going on here?
A prison riot.


It's Thaxton.
I remember you.


He's got a problem.
Put his name in the log.


Two
weeks, Thax. Then the
Mediterranean.


Billie speeds away.
Hey!


She drives off into the fog.


Thax arrives at the security shack.
PLAYBOY
ENTERTAINMENT FOR MEN


Hi. I'm Thaxton. I work the shell game.
Listen, you got a spare flashlight you could loan me? I, uh, lost my wallet.
AREA
SECTION 5-4
4369
AYBOY


Sure, here, take mine. It's a good one, make sure you bring it back. You know how it works?
I'll figure it out.



Thax studies a large map of Dreamland.

The flashlight beam illuminates a detail of the Swamp Ride.




He goes to the far shadowy end of the dock.


Fog creeps over the water. A gator swims by.


He turns on the flashlight and steps into the water.


Thax looks for the spot where he found Cochrane's body.


He turns, and the light beam finds...


Bill Duff.
Turn that damn thing off. You trying to blind me?


Let's see the other hand first, Bill. I'd hate to discover one of May's knives in it.

Duff shows his hand. In it is a small flashlight.




What are you doing way out here, Bill, returning to the scene of the crime?
Just like you, Thax. You said stuff to the cops about me, stuff could damage my reputation.


You can't damage a turd.
Besides, you told the cops a few things about me, too.


Whadda I owe you except a punch in the mouth?
Well, it really doesn't matter, does it Bill, as long as we're still pals?


That's right, 'long as we stay even.
Duff swings hard.

His fist SMASHES Thax's face.



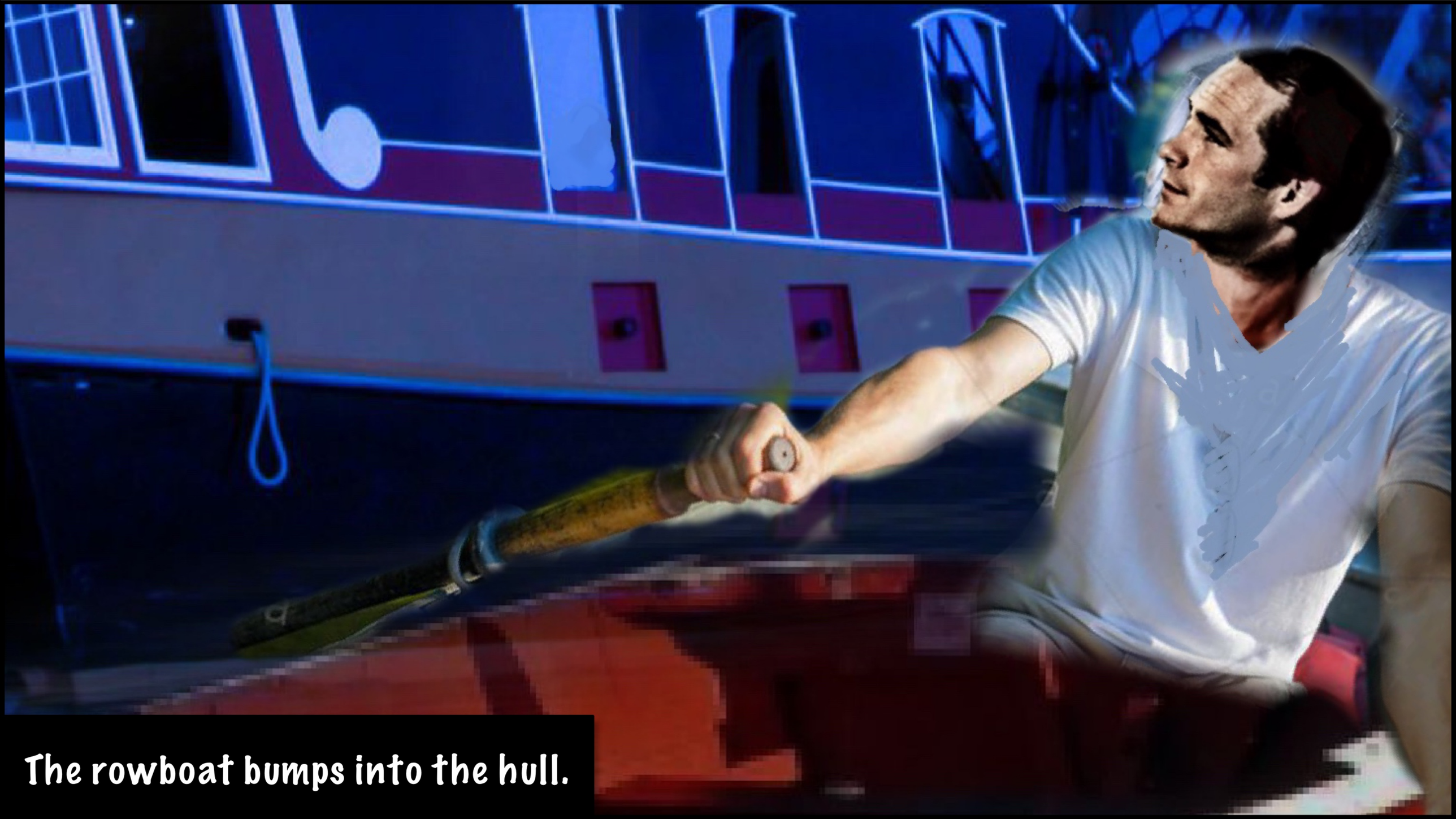
The flashlight drops into the water.



Thax wobbles to his feet. Duff is gone and the flashlight is on the bottom of the swamp.




Thax rows to the Hispaniola.

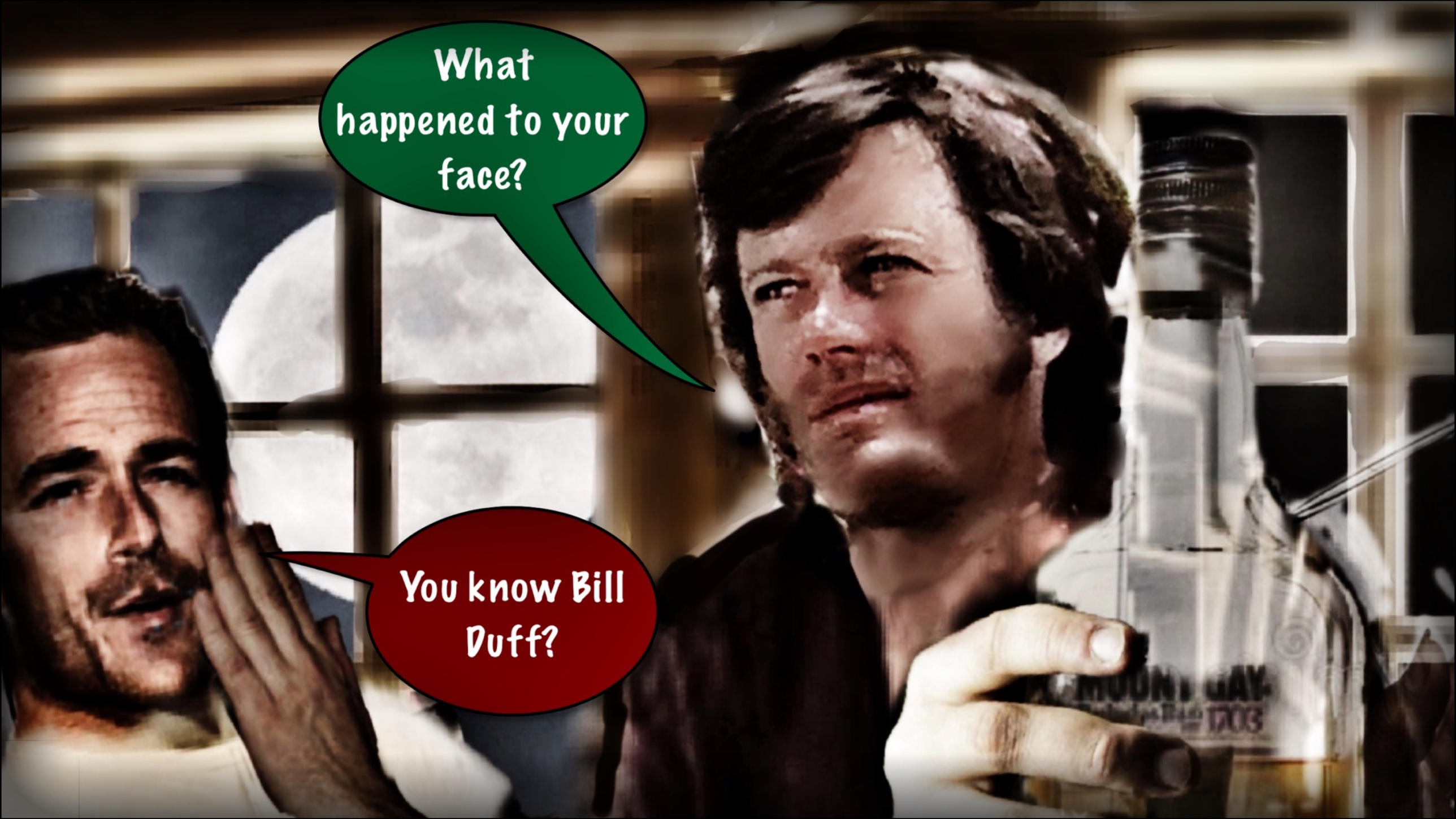

The rowboat bumps into the hull.


Mike Ransome steps out on deck.
Hey, Thax! C'mon in man. My God, it's good to see you.
You can help me pass the long night.

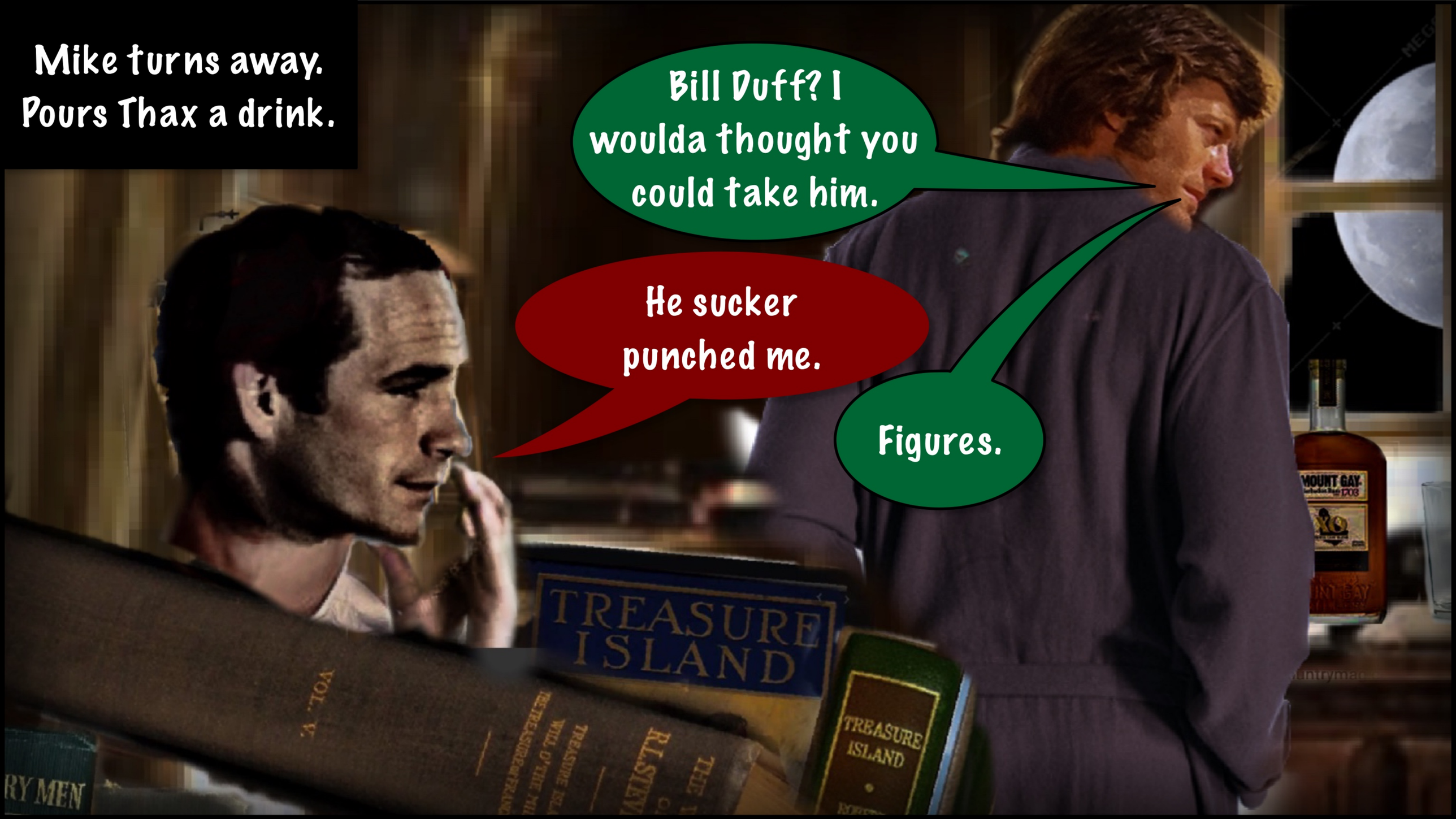

I'm the king
of the insomniacs
you know.


Coffee?
"Let's have a go at the rum."
MOUNT GA


You want a drink?
I could use one.


What happened to your face?
You know Bill Duff?


You're kidding?
You got that drink?


Mike turns away. Pours Thax a drink.
Bill Duff? I woulda thought you could take him.
He sucker punched me.
Figures.
TREASURE ISLAND
TREASURE ISLAND
VOL. V.
MOUNT GAY

Mike turns back and hands Thax a glass of rum.




So what's between you and Duff?
Just an old grudge. We used to work in carny years ago. Me and Bill and May.


How 'bout a refill
My pleasure
Ransome pours him more rum, then...


Listen, I've got to run ashore.
Late date?


I like 'em at this time of night. Their hormone levels are higher.
Is that a fact.


Yeah, make yourself at home. Finish the rum, play some music. I won't be back till morning. You can flop here if you like.
Mike heads out the door.


Thax lifts his glass.
Here's to the young and hard.
He swallows his drink.


Then he grabs the bottle and swills from it.



Thax lies passed out on the dock. Jerry tries to revive him.

Thax rolls over and gets a view of Bev's legs.





She looks like the Fifty-Foot-Woman.

Thax tries to sit up.


But it's too much for him.


The pig. The pig puked on me.
He's sick.


He puked on me for chrissake, Jerry.
Tree house...
C'mon Bev, we gotta get him home.


Make him lay in it, the filthy bastard.
It's not his fault, huh?


You saying
it's mine?


Getting that crap on my nylons.
She furiously wipes her stocking with a Kleenex.

Jerry and Bev help Thax across the suspension bridge to the Treehouse.



They carry him into Tarzan's Hut and drop him on the bed.



He collapses.

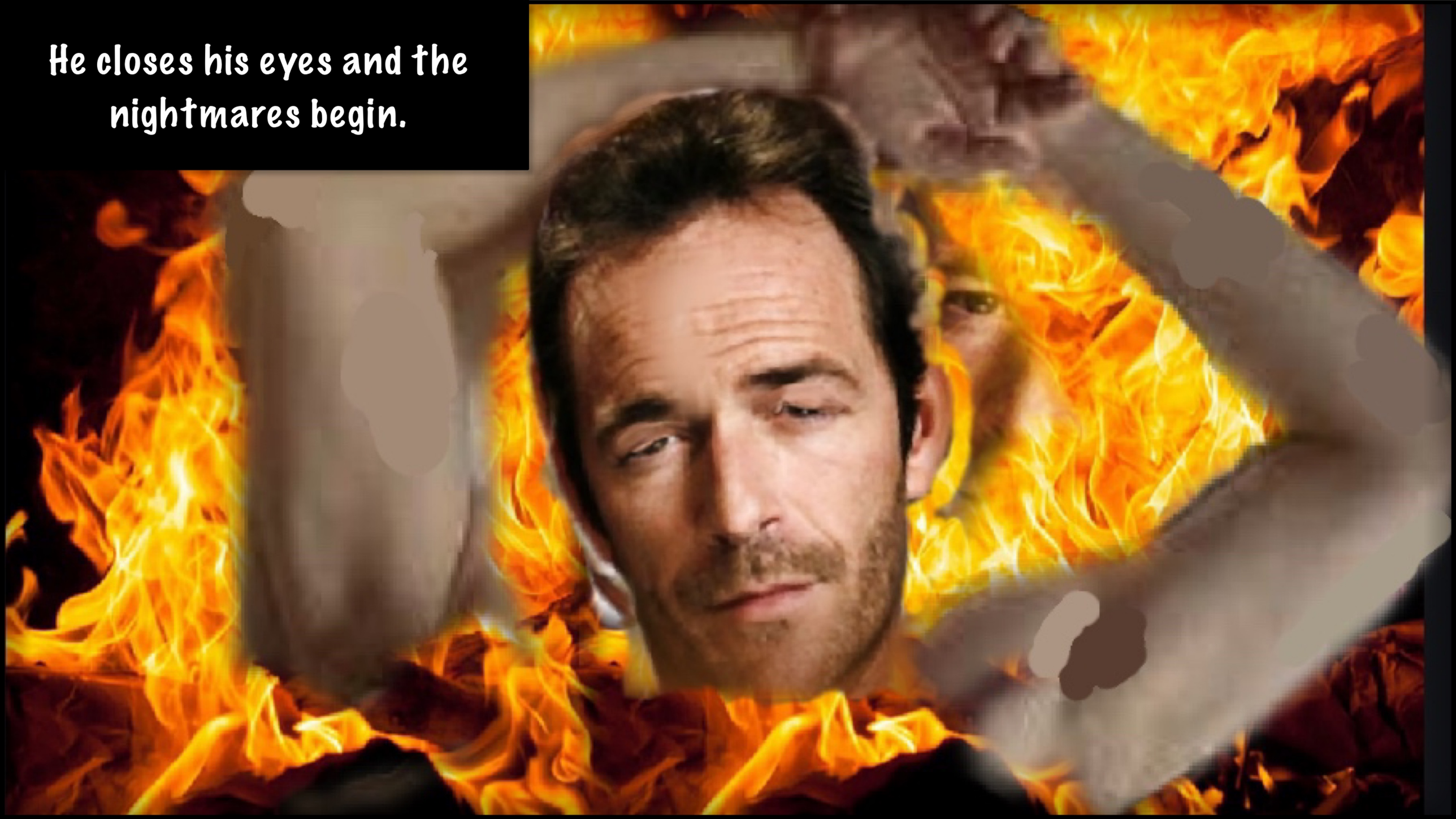




As they depart, Thax tries to focus.


The room starts to spin like a fiery wheel.

He closes his eyes and the nightmares begin.



Distorted dreams come and go.



May with Ransome's head.

May and Billie in tuxedo outfits.




Rob Cochrane.


Billie kissing May.


Long John Silver.


Jimmy in a dress.


Then rats.
Hey Thax, wake up.
Wake up.
Rats running, playing on his shoulder blades, then clawing.

The rats turn into a monkey.





The monkey becomes Terry Orme. He tries to shake Thax awake.


Orme starts to spin, slowly at first, then faster.
Listen to me can't you?
Listen to me can't you?
Listen to me can't you?


Thax sinks deeper into his pillow.
Uugh, go 'way.



Thax passes out. A very long silence, then...



A terrified SCREAM in the night, going down, down, down, until:


SPLAT!

Thax sits up suddenly and opens his eyes.



He hears voices from outside. Erratic blades of light slice through the struts of the treehouse.



Thax gets up and steps outside.



Down below, a gang of people stand around a small still shape.

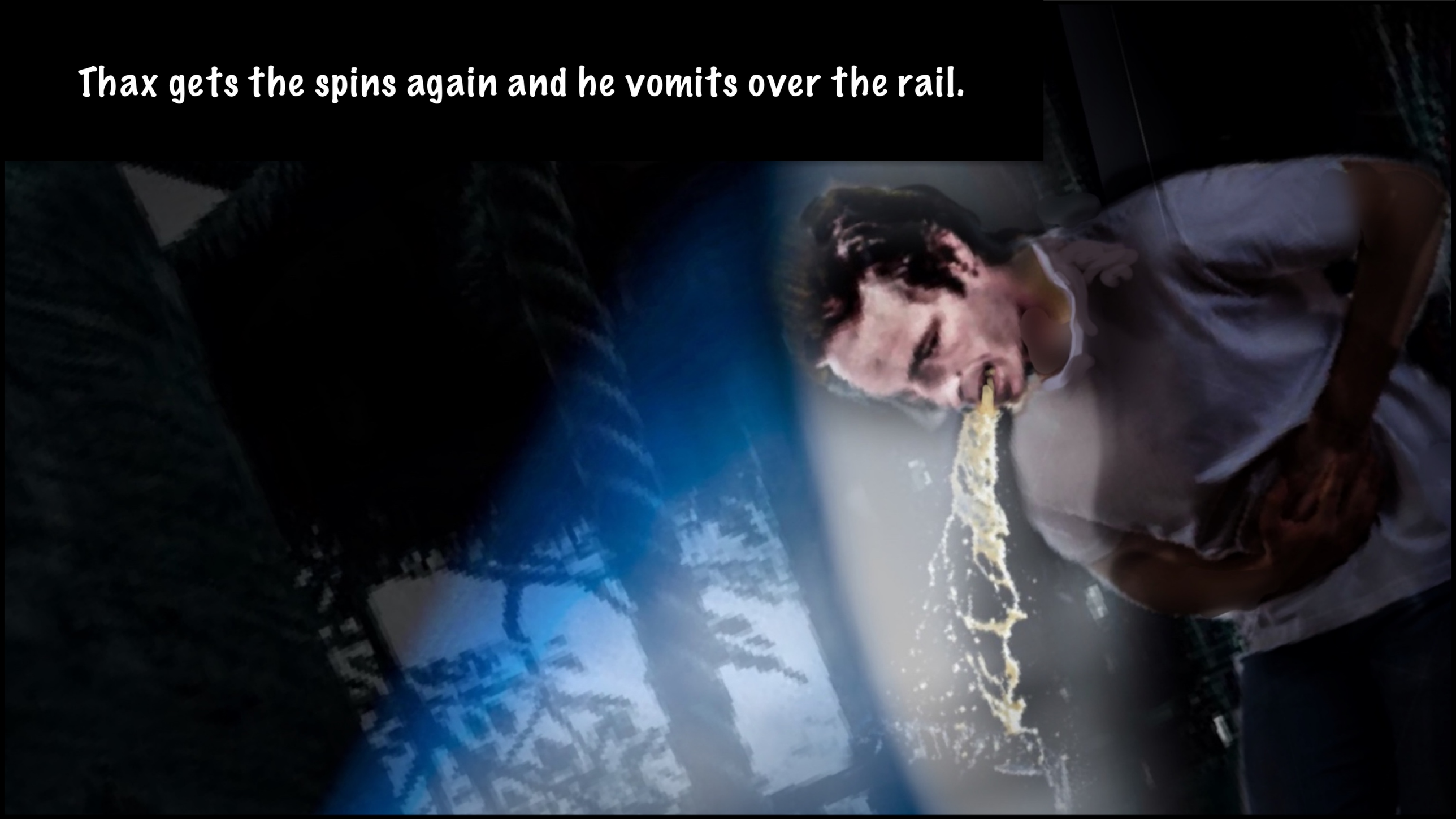


Thax strains to see what they see.




Flashlight beams whizz around until one lands on Thax's face.
Hey! Somebody's up there.

Thax gets the spins again and he vomits over the rail.




The crowd below yells and scatters.


He hears the sound of a cop POUNDING up the steps.

Later, Thax sits on the ground. The cop, Iturbi, tries to yank him to his feet.




Ferris points to a crumpled shape on the ground.
What do you know about that?
A couple of people move aside to reveal...


Terry Orme. DEAD.

The cops grill Thax in the bunkhouse.




What about this midget?
I don't know. He was scared.
Scared of what? How do you know he was scared of anything?


Because he came to me for help. Said he was in trouble.
That's all? Said he was in trouble? Then what? He ran away?


No. I passed out on him.
Too bad you were such a drunken slob you couldn't help him.

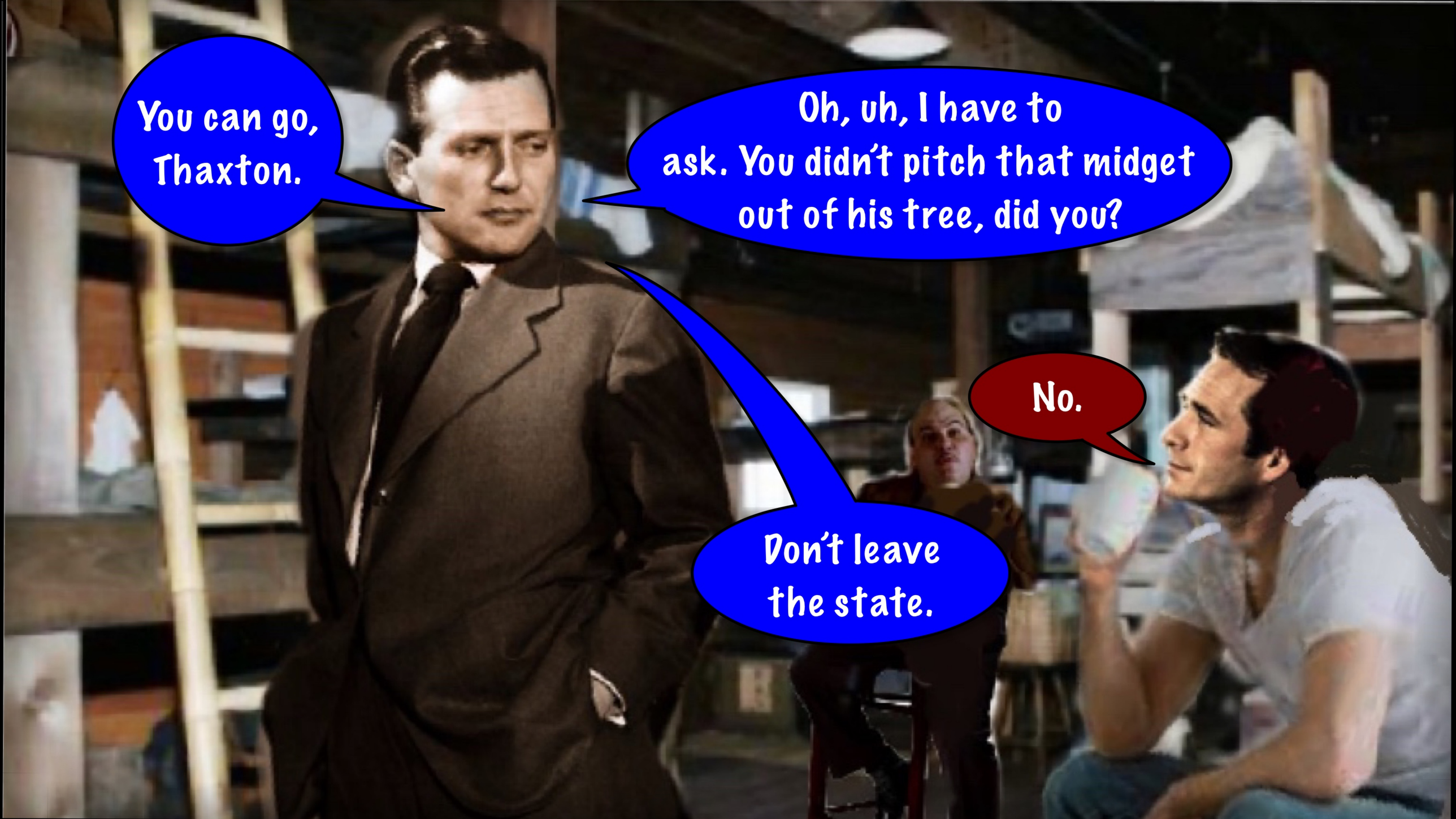

You think he jumped?
What? Killed himself. No.


He had too much to live for.
I agree. He climbed around in trees for a living. There's no way he slipped.


You know Bill Duff?
You know I do.


He found the body. Said he happened to encounter you earlier, prowling around the swamp with a flashlight.


I couldn't sleep.
You know that kid Jimmy Bentley? A little on the girly side? Have any idea where he might be?
No.

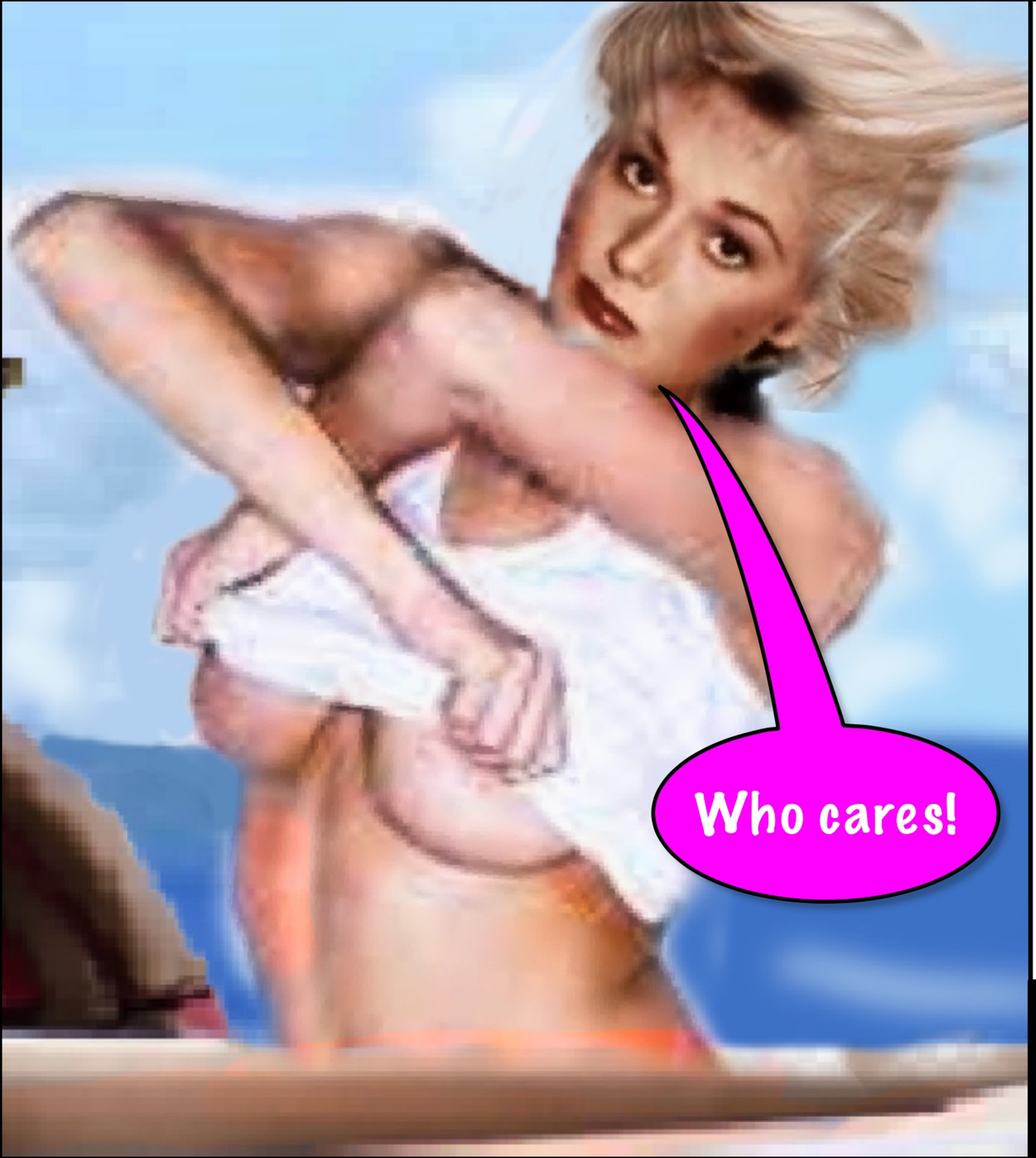

You can go, Thaxton.
Oh, uh, I have to ask. You didn't pitch that midget out of his tree, did you?
No.
Don't leave the state.

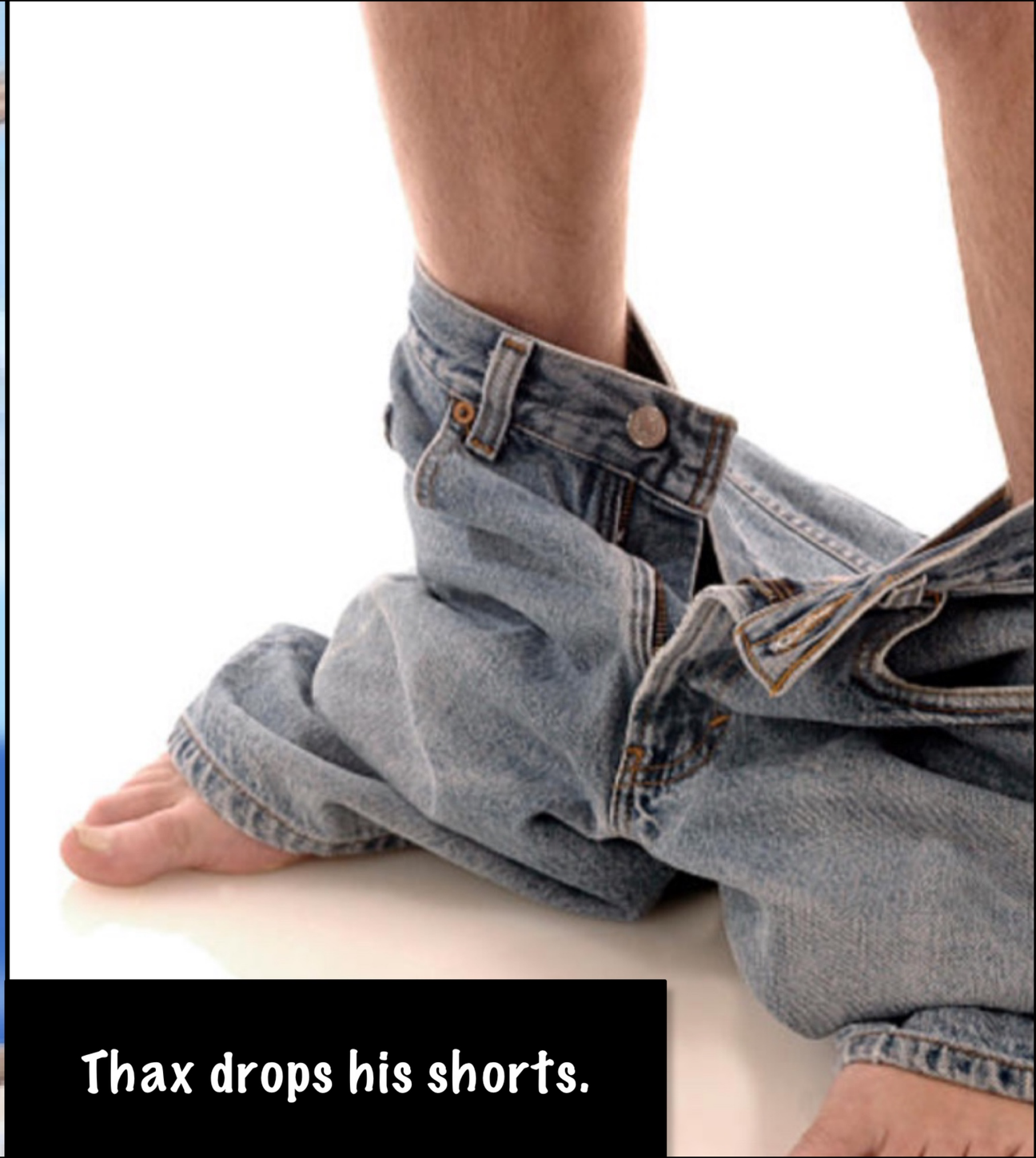
Thax and Billie drive down the coast highway.




Poor folks. Can't live in the nice plushy Mediterranean like us.
Thax parks near the beach.


C'mon, let's go swimming.
No suits.





Thax drops his shorts.


He races across the sand to catch her.
Hey!

He dives in and swims after her.

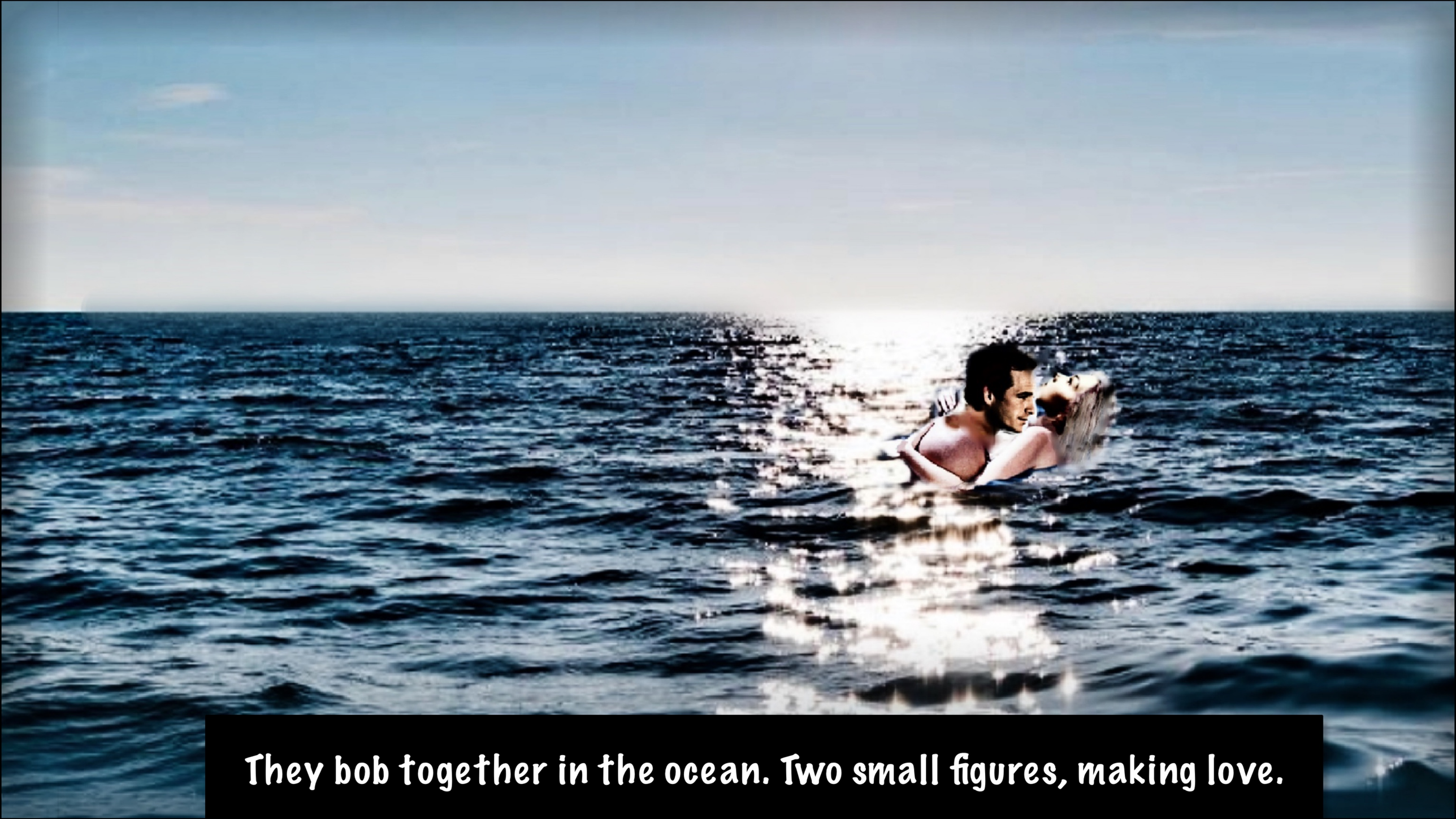



It's glorious.
It's like how our whole future is going to be.

Thax catches up to her.




She slips her legs around him.


They bob together in the ocean. Two small figures, making love.



Later, they enter a trailer park.



A snarling pit bull crawls out from beneath a trailer.


Jimmy?
Jimmy
Bentley?
Don't go any closer, Thax. I saw a pit bull bite a woman on TV once.


Jimmy's mom opens the door.
What do you want?
I want to talk to Jimmy.
16
Uh, maybe he mentioned me? My name is Thax.





Jimmy comes to the door, cautiously.




Just wondering where you went is all.


So's everybody else.
The cops were here this morning.
I skipped out the back and hid in the palmettos. Mom told them I went north, which is what I'm gonna do soon as night comes.


16
Why?
People seem to think I know something and I don't. I'm scared.
Of what?


I guess finding Mr. Cochrane like that, and all those cops, then yesterday, that little guy, the monkey man.
Terry Orme?

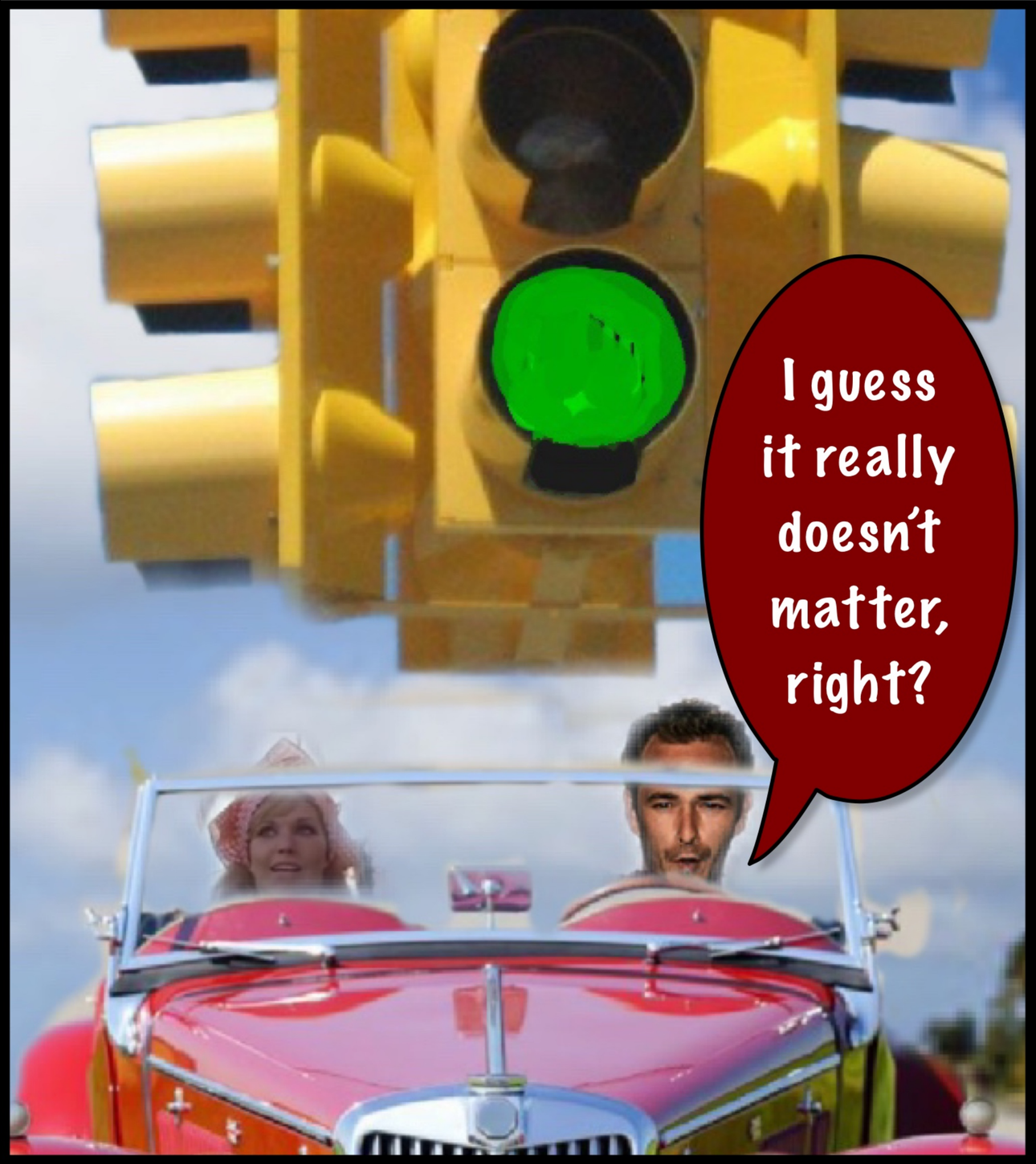

Yeah,
he wanted to know if anyone was aking
questions about him.
He didn't mean the cops
either, he meant someone from the show.
He was scared.
16


Thax watches Jimmy's reaction closely.
He's dead.
Oh man...
oh man.
So does Billie.

They're stopped at a traffic light, heading back to Dreamland, having their first fight.

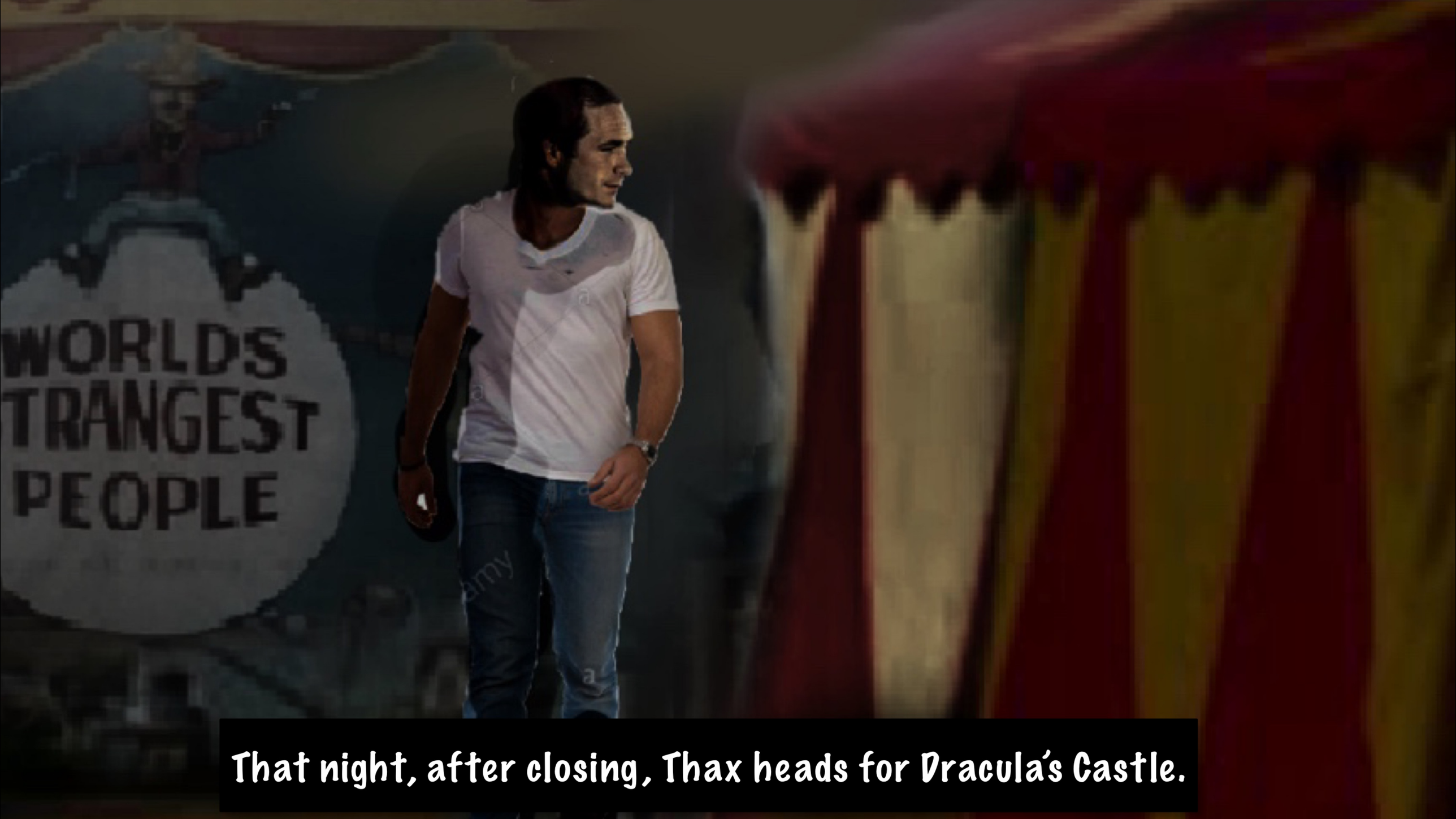



You mean just forget about it?
Yes.
Two guys are dead, Billie, I mean, what the hell?
They're dead and you can't help them.



They pull away.





That night, after closing, Thax heads for Dracula's Castle.

He enters and walks down a stairway that leads to a door.



Jerry greets him at the door.




Card game in progress. Ransome spots Thax as he enters.
Hey, Thax.
Over here. I'll even let
you deal for me!



Duff shoots Thax a belligerent look.


Thax pulls up a chair behind Mike.
Grab yourself a drink, Thax.
No thanks.

Ransome shuffles and deals.




Gabby gets a black Ace.
Mike gets the spade two.
Duff has a pair of eights up. He bets.
Twenty.

Ransome deals again.



Duff gets another eight, three of a kind.


Time to
seperate the men from
the boys.



Duff bets three twenties.

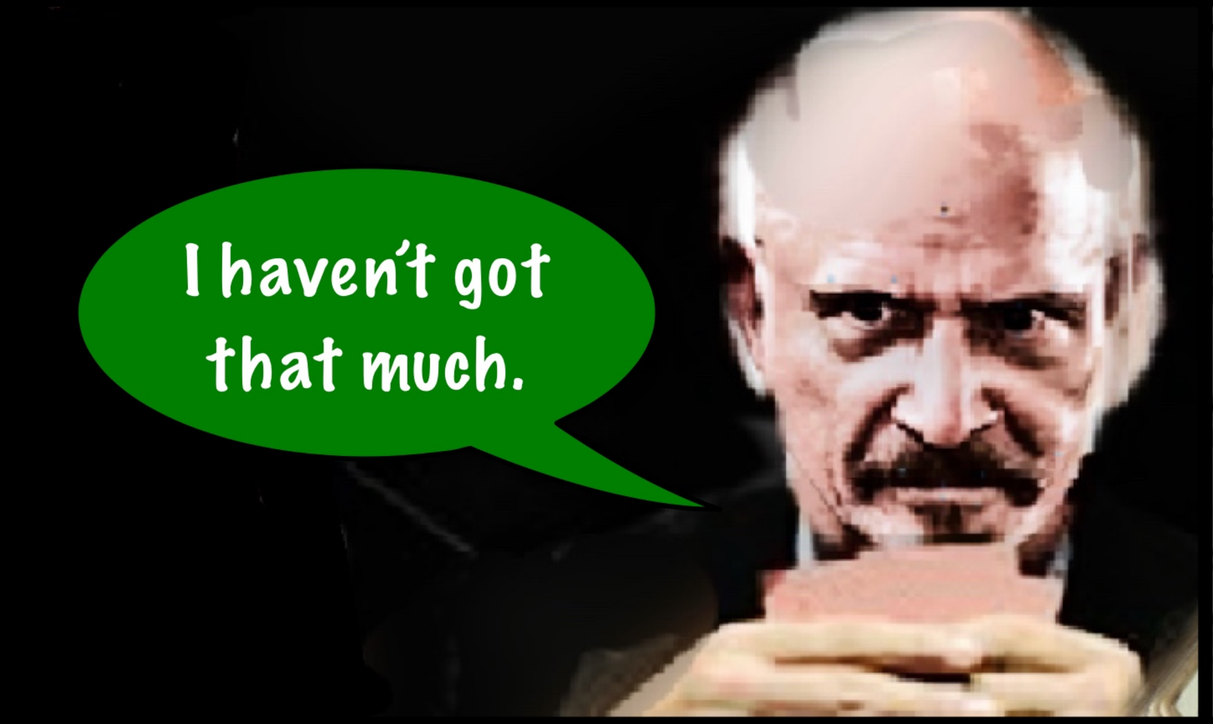


Ransome shoves eight twenties into the pot.


Ransome studies his cards, then...
See the sixty and bump one forty.
I'm out.
See one forty and bump again.


C'mon, dammit. See or fold.


Twenty. Forty. Sixty. Eighty. One hundred. Two hundred. Three hundred.
Ransome ups the stakes.


I haven't got that much.


How much have you got?


About two bills.
Shove it in. Tomorrow's payday, McDuff. I'll trust you until then.

All eyes on Duff. A long tense moment, until...





Duff folds, and throws his cards down.

He hands his hole card to Thax.





Give it to Bill
for Christmas, Thax.
I've got a date.

Ransome laughs as he scoops up his winnings.

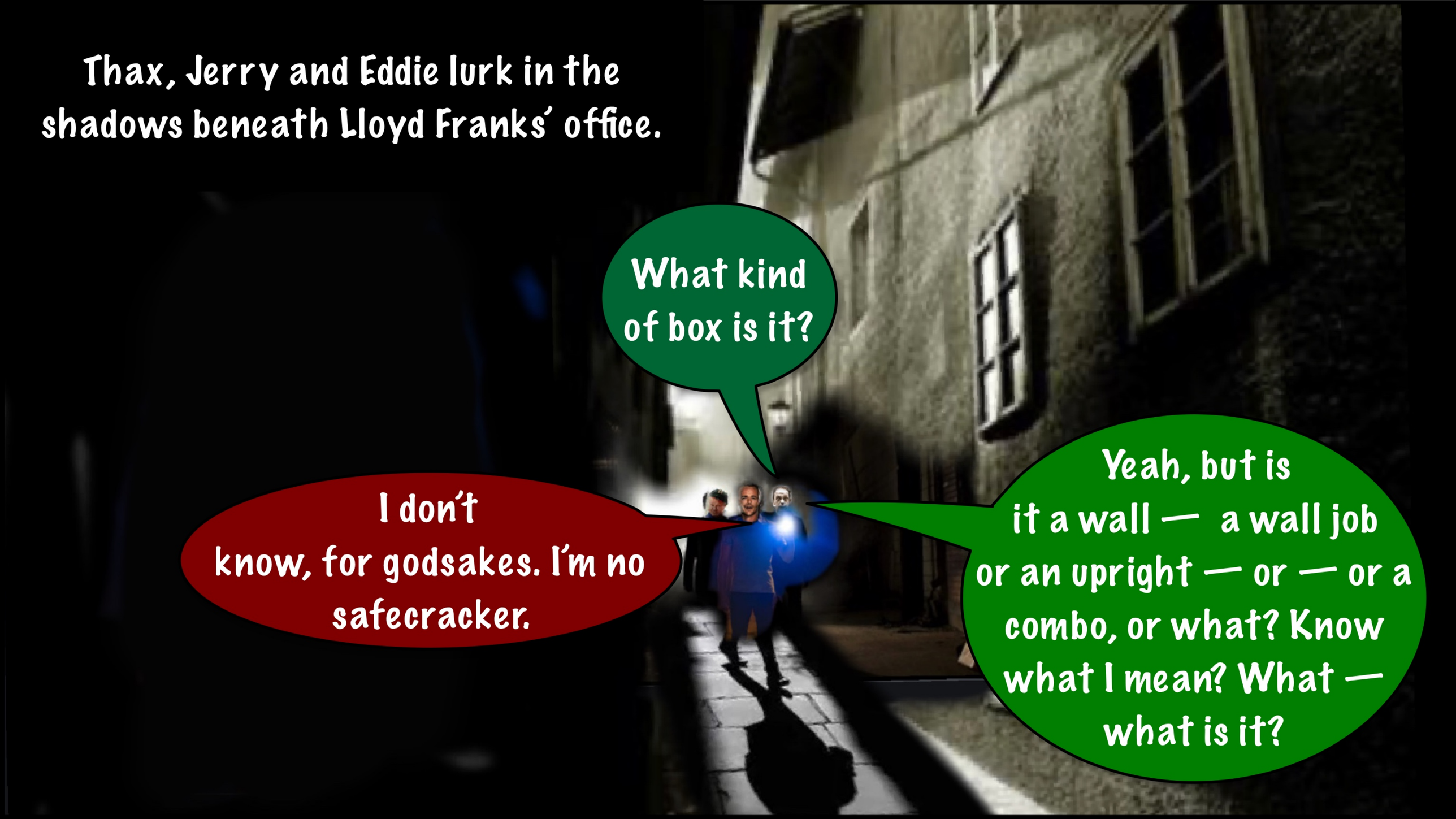


Ransome leaves.


Thax shows the hole card to Duff.


Duff storms off, humiliated by his loss.

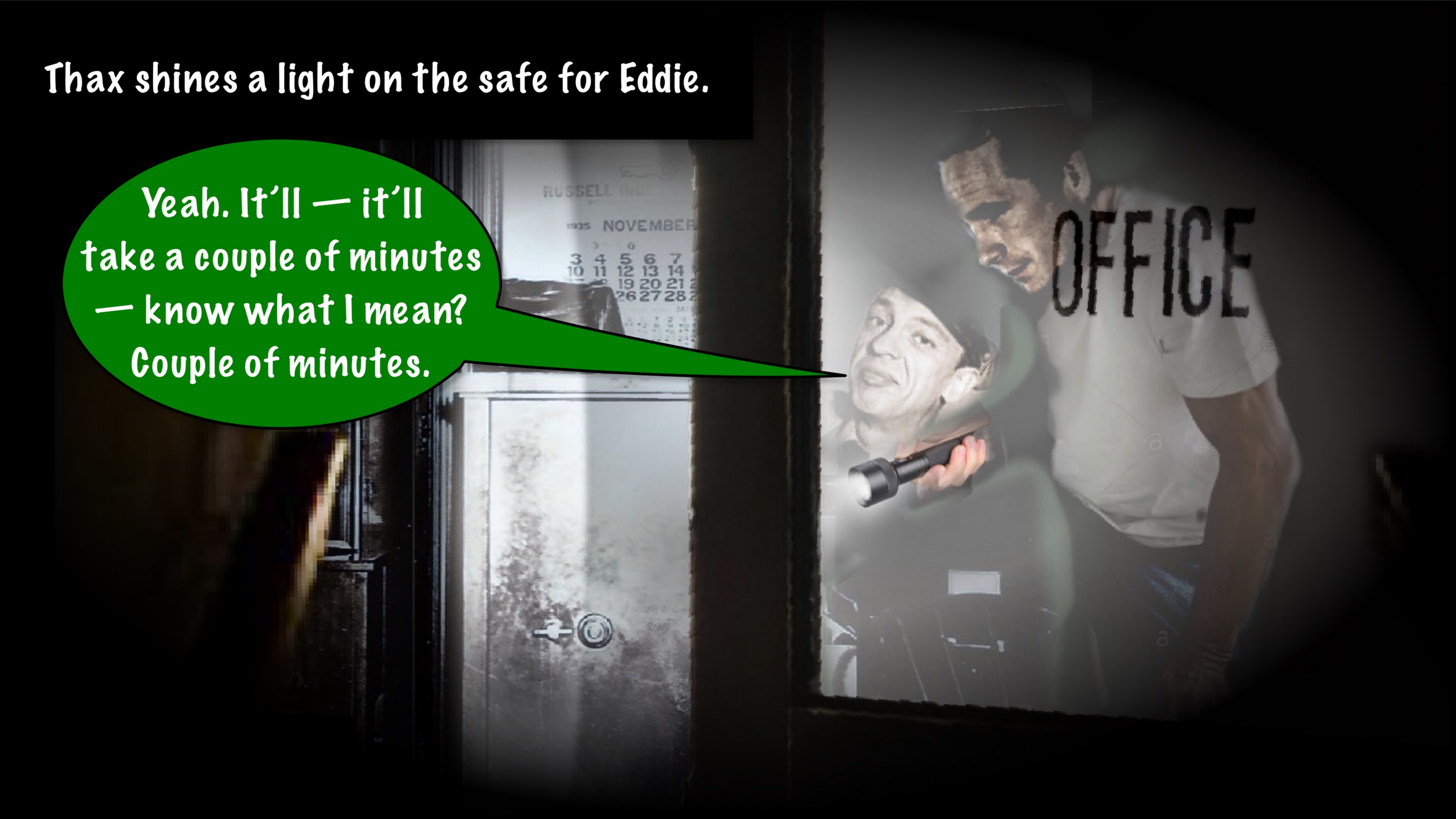

Three of Clubs? Jesus, that Ransome is wild.
Listen, Jerry. I need a favor.


Thax, Jerry and Eddie lurk in the shadows beneath Lloyd Franks' office.
What kind of box is it?
I don't know, for godsakes. I'm no safecracker.
Yeah, but is it a wall — a wall job or an upright — or — or a combo, or what? Know what I mean? What — what is it?


It's not in a wall, and it's a combination box.
Well all right then.
I just want — want to know what kind it is, see?


C'mon, let's go
before the security guard
comes staggering by.


Eddie picks the lock.
OFFICE
Click!


Thax shines a light on the safe for Eddie.
Yeah. It'll — it'll take a couple of minutes — know what I mean? Couple of minutes.
OFFICE


Eddie puts his ear against the dial, listening to the tumblers.
Seven — seventeen to the right. Four left. It's old and noisy. No problem. Yeah, no problem.


Eddie opens the safe.
Thax reaches inside.

He grabs an envelope.





He slips the envelope in his pocket and closes the safe.

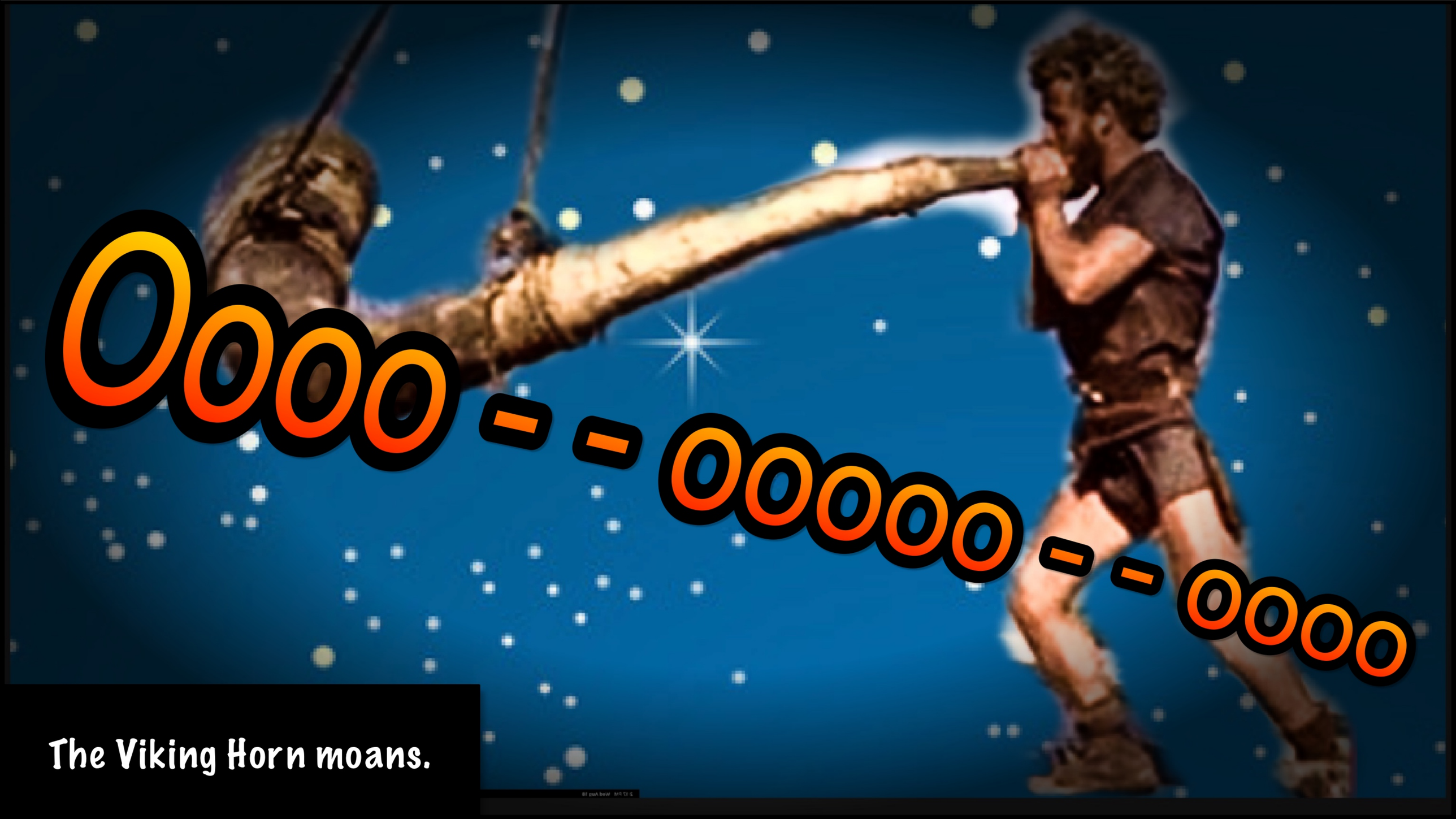
Eddie wipes the dial with his handkerchief.



What kind of booze you like, Eddie? I owe you.

No — no thanks. I never — never touch it, see. Not — a — not a drop. It m-makes me nervous. Know what I mean?


Later that night.
The
GALLER
of
FREA
Find The
3 SHE



The Viking Horn moans.


Thax closes up.
Oooo - - oooo - - oooo
WORLDS STRANGEST PEOPLE



He strolls over to the Palace of Illusions.


The last round of marks exit the tent.


Thax heads around back.
I'm sorry, Thax.
For what?
For calling you an asshole.


You can make it up to me.
How?


Let's go
see Dracula.

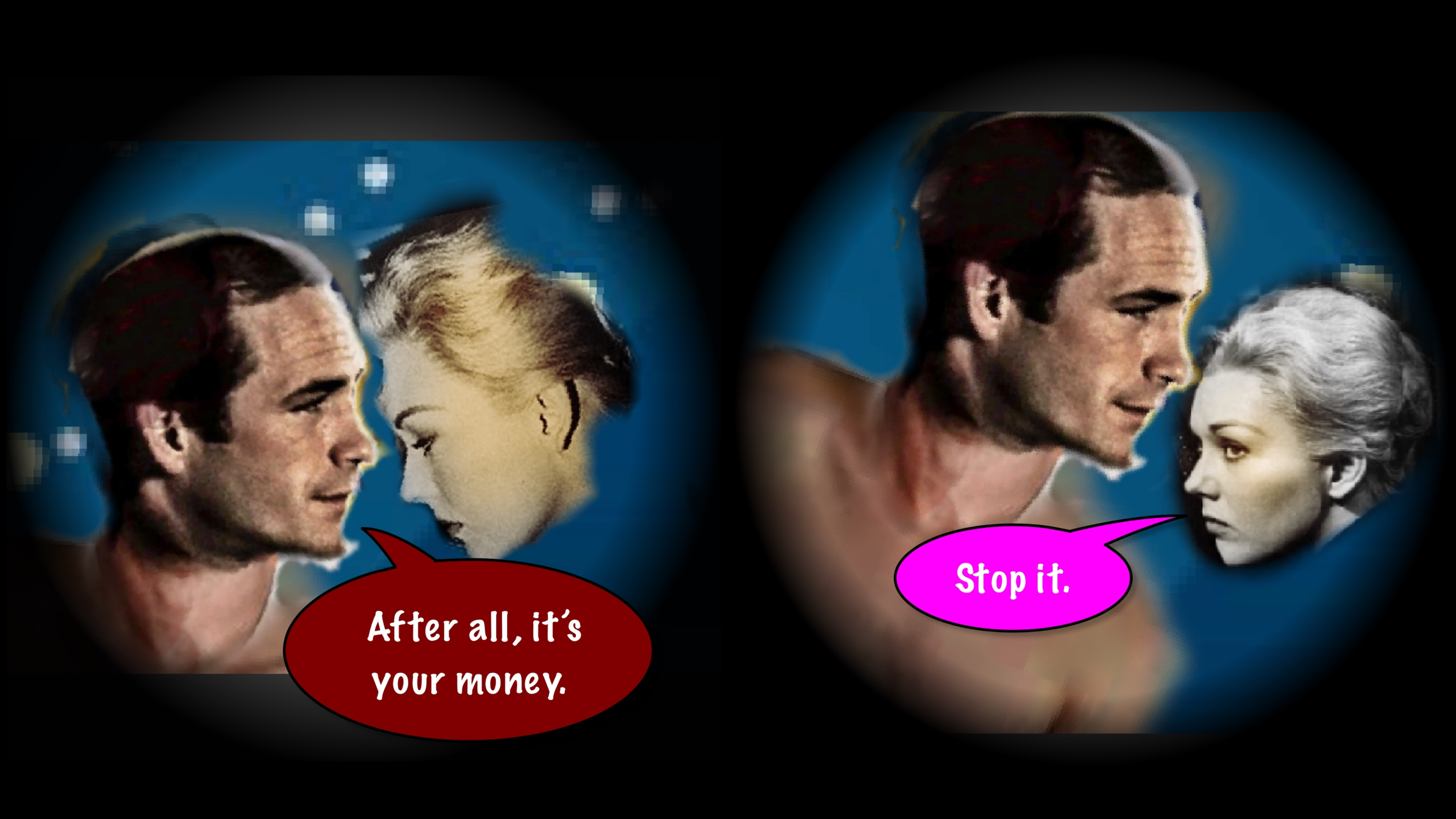


Thax and Billie lie in Dracula's bed.

Thax gets up and looks out the window.




That's up to you, isn't it?
What do you mean? Why isn't it up to both of us?
Because I don't have much say in it, do I?
Mix Layer
Mix Layer
Mix Layer


After all, it's your money.
Stop it.


Well, it doesn't really matter, does it?
I wish to God you'd stop saying that, because it does matter.

Saturday night. Thax is working hard, getting a good play.







Gabby whistles, and gives a nod in the direction of two tough characters.



Chad and Phil approach the shell game.


Chad steps up and flashes a badge.
Mister Thaxton, Lieutenant Ferris wants to see you.
Find another corpse?

Chad's sidekick, Phil, chimes in.



Thax sweeps up his shells.



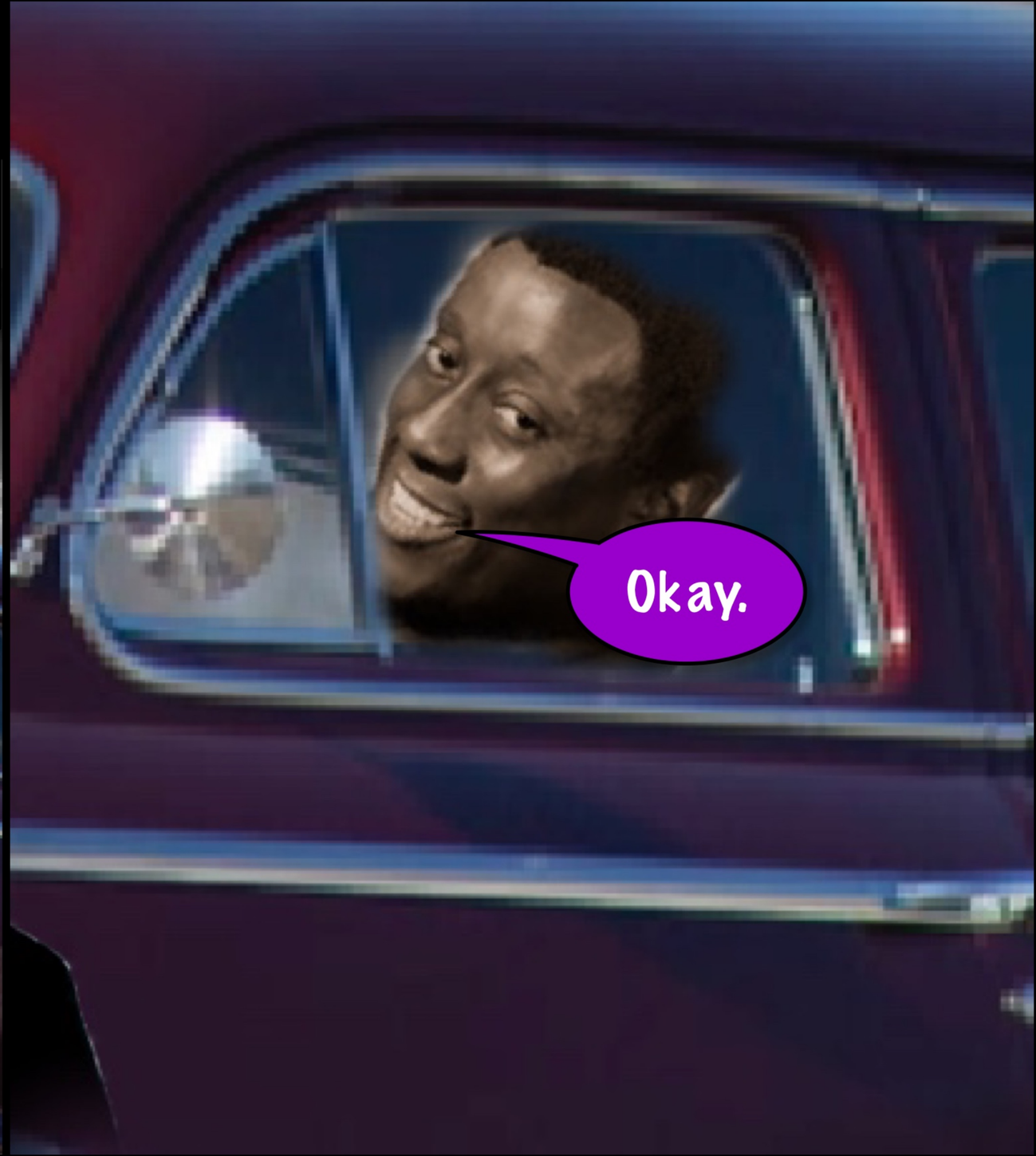
As they walk through the parking lot, Thax lags his pace.




Phil jams his elbow into Thax's ribs.
He don't want no trouble, do you, bull's eye?

Chad leads Thax to a big sedan. Bob, the driver, sits waiting at the wheel.





Thax pivots and slugs
Phil in the gut.





Chad gives Thax a mean chop to the neck.


During the scuffle, Thax lifts Phil's revolver and palms it.

Then Phil gut punches him, hard.





Thax doubles over and slips the pistol into his pants.




Phil knees him in the face.
Enough!
Get in the car, bull's-eye.
Okay, okay. I've had enough.





Bob covers Thax with a .38 while Chad gets in.


Chad aims his .45 at Thax, then turns to Bob.
Go!


Slow.
Let's not attract attention.
I know my job, Chad.
Of course you do.


What say we stop somewheres, Chad? I'd like to get a head start on bull's-eye here.
Cut it out.


No
hard feelings,
Mister Thaxton,
just the way
it goes.


Do I just get a beating from pee-wee here, or is it serious?
You're mine, bull's-eye.


I wouldn't worry about it, Mister Thaxton.
One way or another you've got to face it.
Sure. But I'd like to be able to prepare myself, if it doesn't make any difference to you.
You're going to die, Mister Thaxton. I hope you'll take it like a man and not make me sorry I told you.


Who hired you?
I thought you wanted to prepare yourself. It can't be a good thing to die with a head full of bitter hatred and futile recriminations.


Look. There could be money in this. Big money.
I'm afraid you're not very astute, Mister Thaxton. Elimination and blackmail are two divergent businesses. If you try to mix them, you end up going bankrupt.


They turn off the main road.


What you say, Chad? We have some fun with him first, huh?
No.
Are we close?
Uh-huh. Any place along here. Nearest development is five miles.



The headlight beams converge ahead, showing fifty yards of dirt road.


So. Right here, huh?
I did mention I was sorry, didn't I?


Phil giggles, he opens the door, turns back to Chad.
Lemme square him away, huh Chad?


Thax makes his move.
Anybody seen pee-wee's pistol?

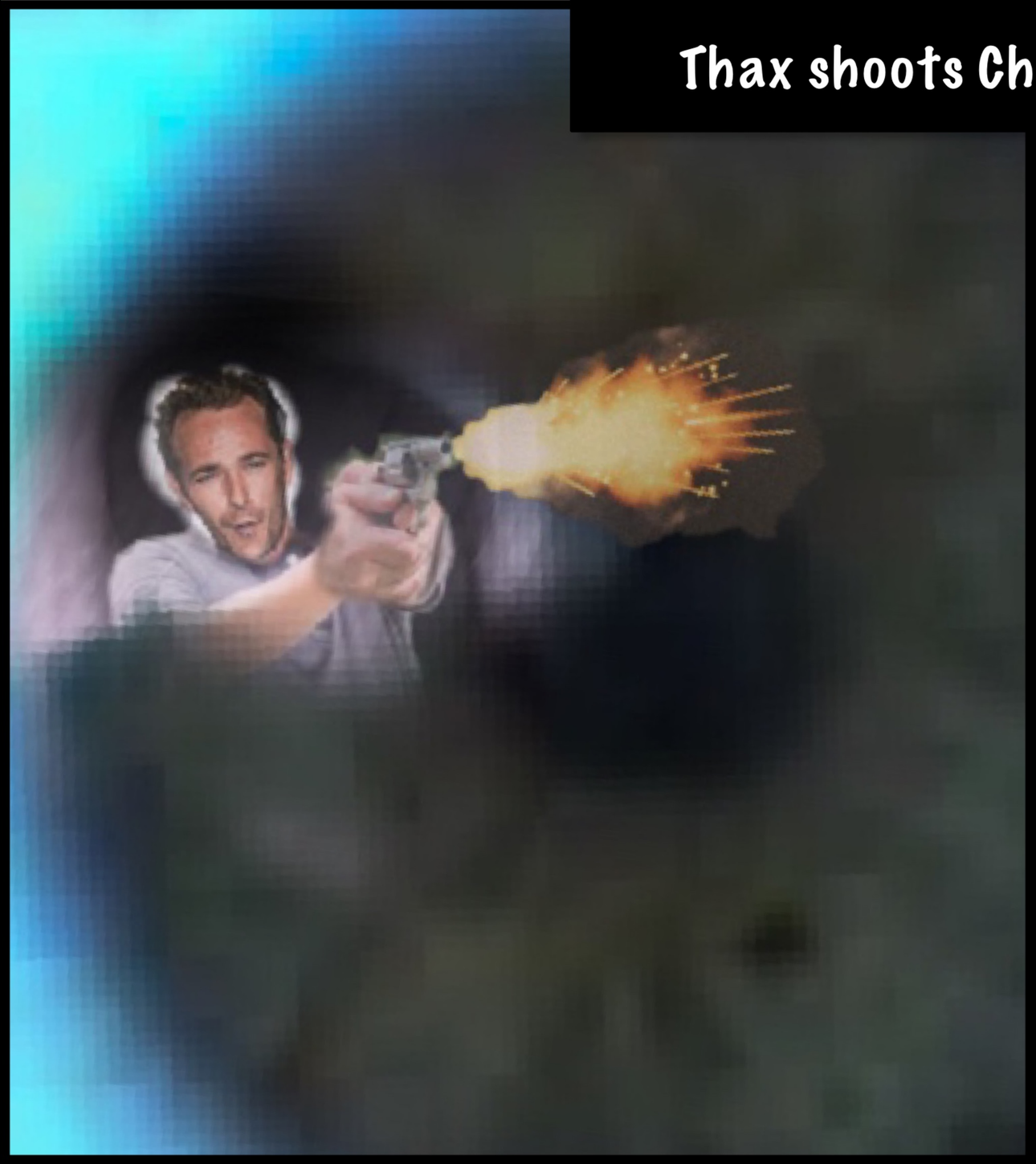
Phil slaps a hand to his empty shoulder holster.

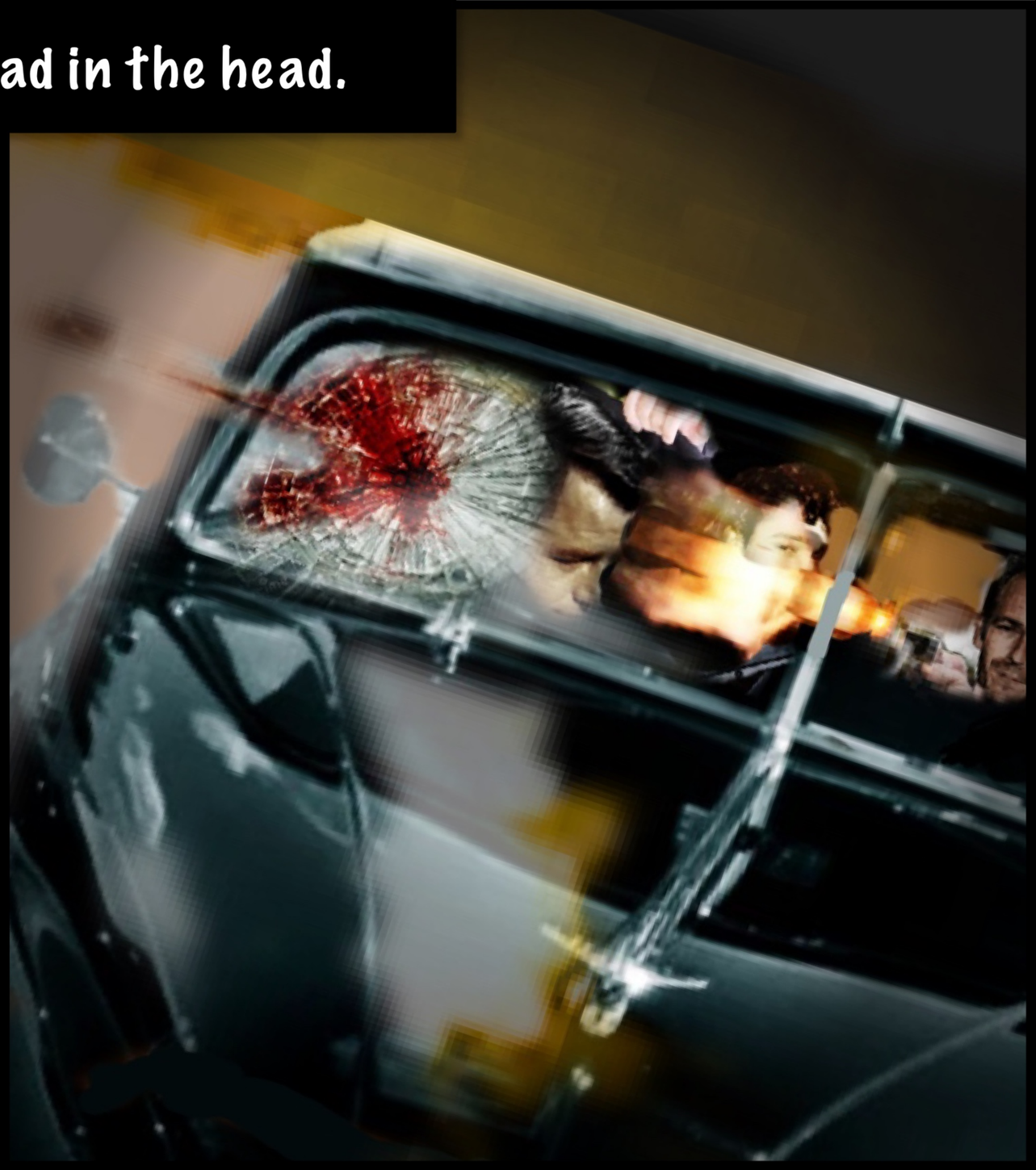


Thax draws the gun.


Chad's
eyes
follow
the gun.

Thax shoots Chad in the head.






Then he slams against Phil.


They fall out of the car
and roll onto the road.

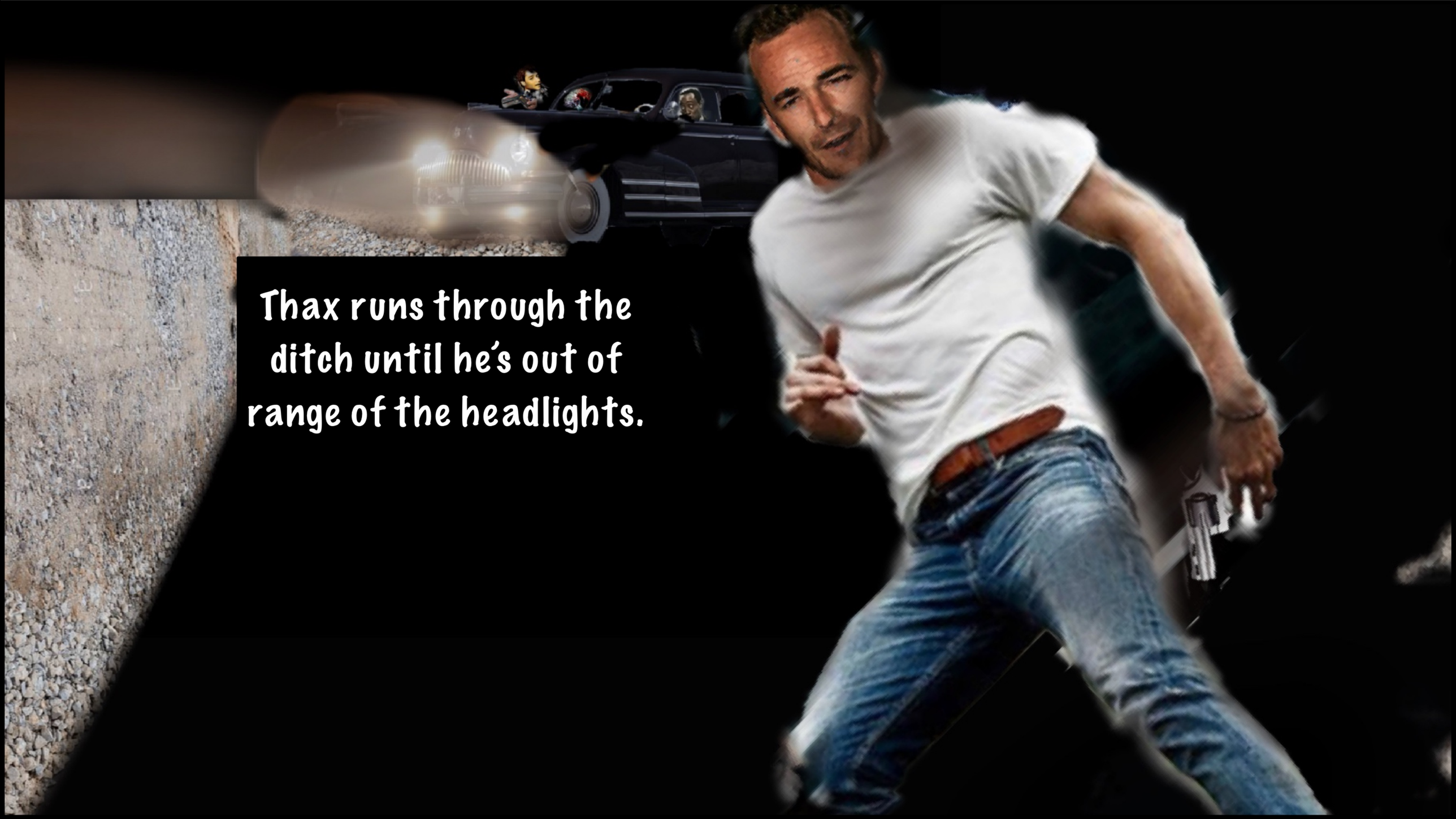
Thax takes a running jump into the ditch.




Bob's gun goes POW-POW-POW out the window.
Take the right side. I'll take the left.
He must be in the ditch.


He's mine, goddam you Bob! You hear me? Wait'll I get Chad's gun.


Aw Gee-sus, Bob! You see what he done to Chad?


Thax runs through the ditch until he's out of range of the headlights.


Then he sneaks up to the edge of the ditch and looks back down the road.



Phil's silhouette cuts across the glowering headlights. He holds Chad's .45 at hip level.


Thax rests the gun on his knees, takes careful aim and calls.
Down here.
Phil spins.


Thax SHOOTS!


Phil's knees buckle and he drops.



Bob piles back into the car.


The car lurches forward.
Jesus Christ!
Bob! WAAAAHH!!!


CRUNCH! The sedan bounces over Phil.

Bob is rattled. He stomps on the gas and the big sedan comes hurtling down the road.







Thax empties the pistol into the oncoming windshield.


The car swerves out of control.


Thax takes a frantic roll back into the ditch.


The car flips.

Then the tentative SOUND of ruptured metal parts and the PLIPPETY-PLIP of puddling liquid.



Bob hangs upside down out the window. DEAD.



Thax goes down the road and finds Phil, hemorrhaging from the mouth.




Thax wipes down the pistol and pitches it into the ditch.

He starts hoofing it back the way they came.





2 AM: Thax sits in a diner drinking black coffee.



A taxi pulls up and honks.







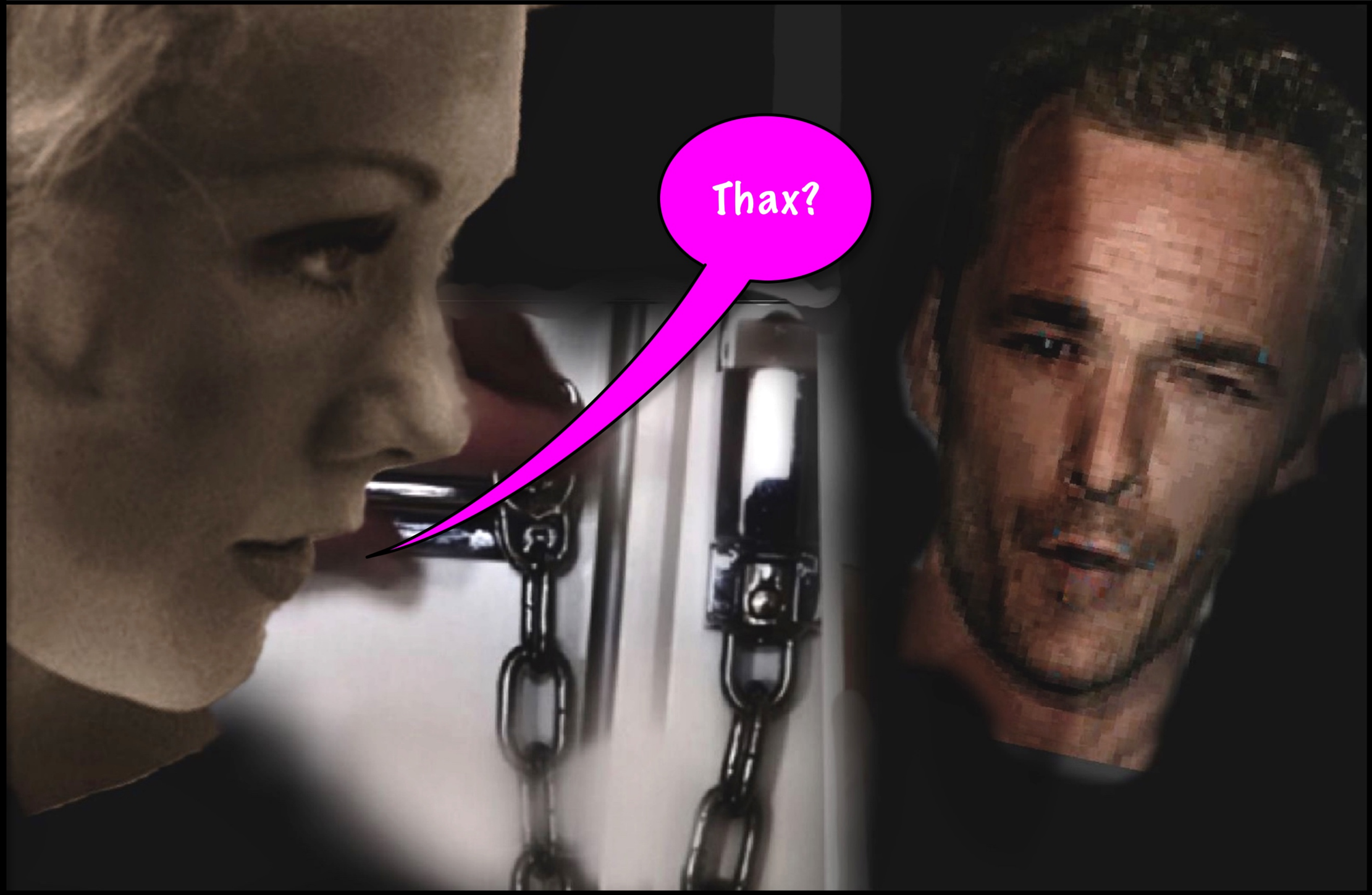


Thax pays the cabbie and gets out.



Billie is getting ready for bed. She hears a knock on the door.

She opens it but leaves the safety chain hooked.

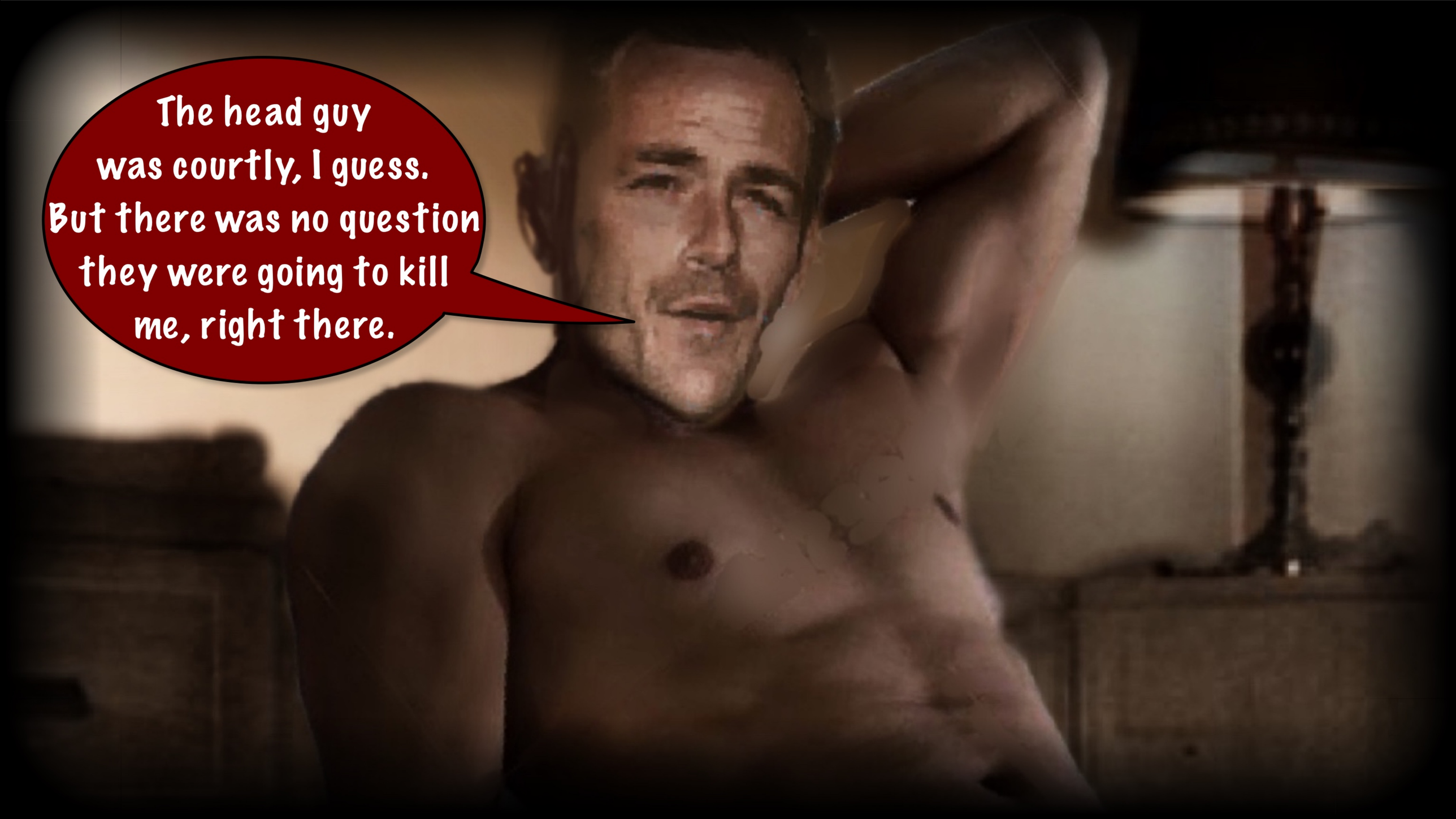


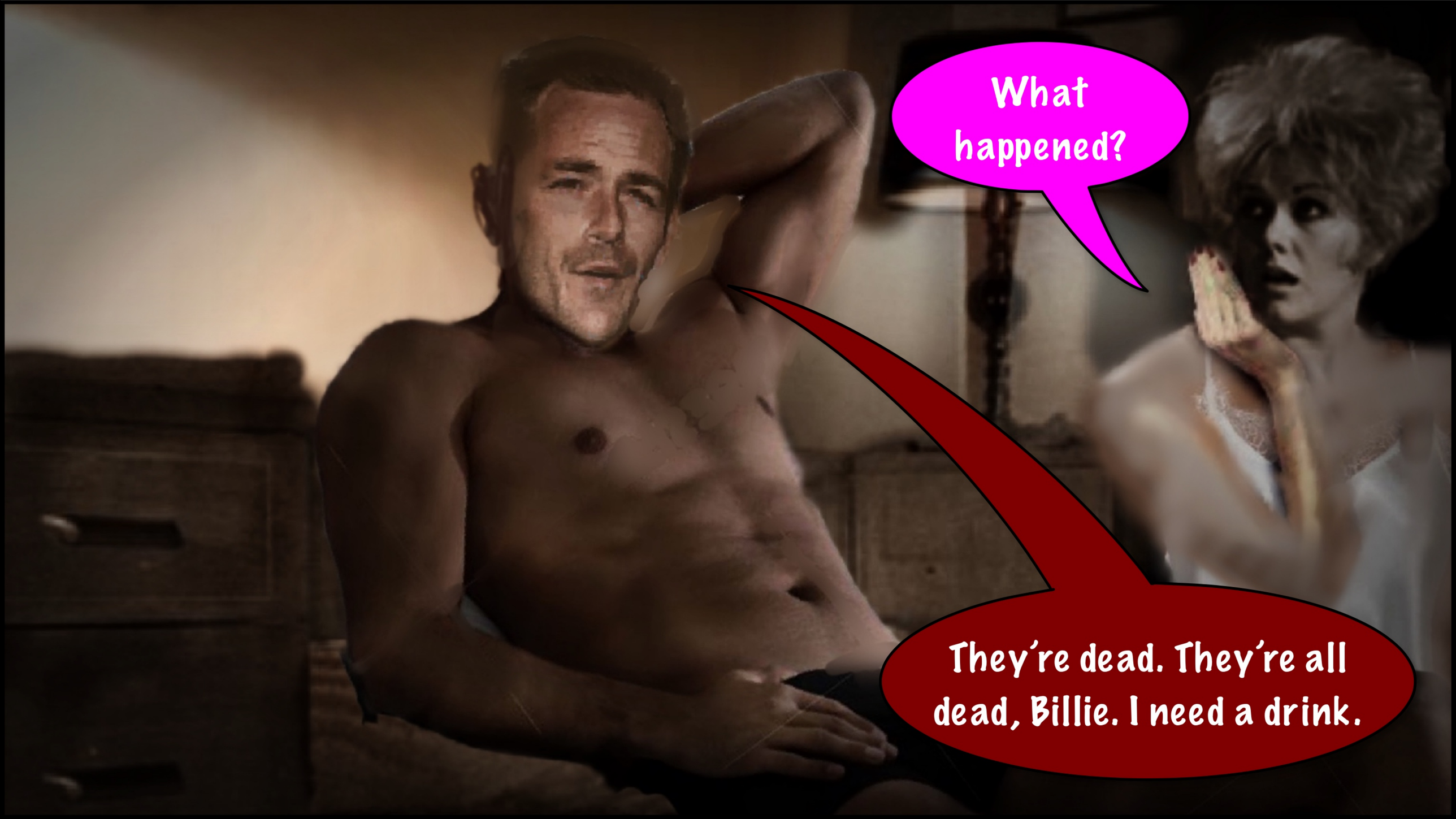

She undoes the chain. He steps in.
I had some trouble.
What happened?


It was a car accident.
Well, who's car?
Was anybody hurt?


Nobody hurt, just three guys killed.
Okay I use your bathroom? I feel dirty.


Later.
Three guys drove me out to a deserted spot.
The whole thing seemed twisted and formal.


The head guy was courtly, I guess. But there was no question they were going to kill me, right there.


What happened?
They're dead. They're all dead, Billie. I need a drink.

She goes to the kitchen, pours him some whiskey.




Thax gulps
the booze.




Thax starts to shake and sweat.


He buries his face in her
breast like a child.

Billie turns out the lights.





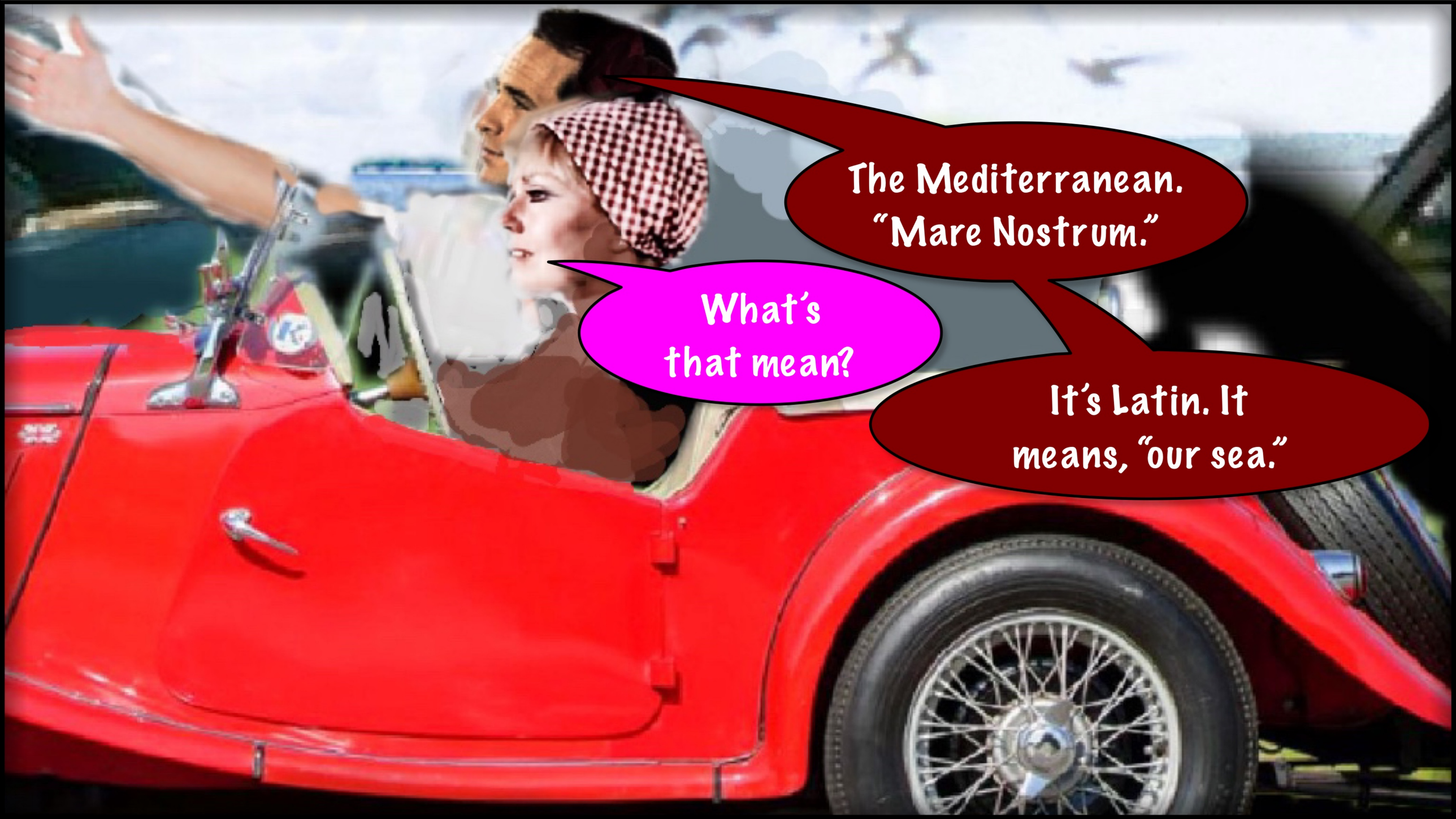
She slips out of her nighty...


...and gets into bed beside him.


God, I need you.
They make love in a desperate, fever-sweat, kind of way.


Dreamland
ENTRANCE
I've got some clean shirts and books and stuff I'll pick up after we close tonight and meet you at the main gate.
The next day.


Thax, be careful. Don't trust anyone.
I never do, Billie.
We're so close.


The Mediterranean. "Mare Nostrum."
What's that mean?
It's Latin. It means, "our sea."

A hot sultry day.





Thax works his game for a while then takes a break.

He heads over to Gabby's joint.

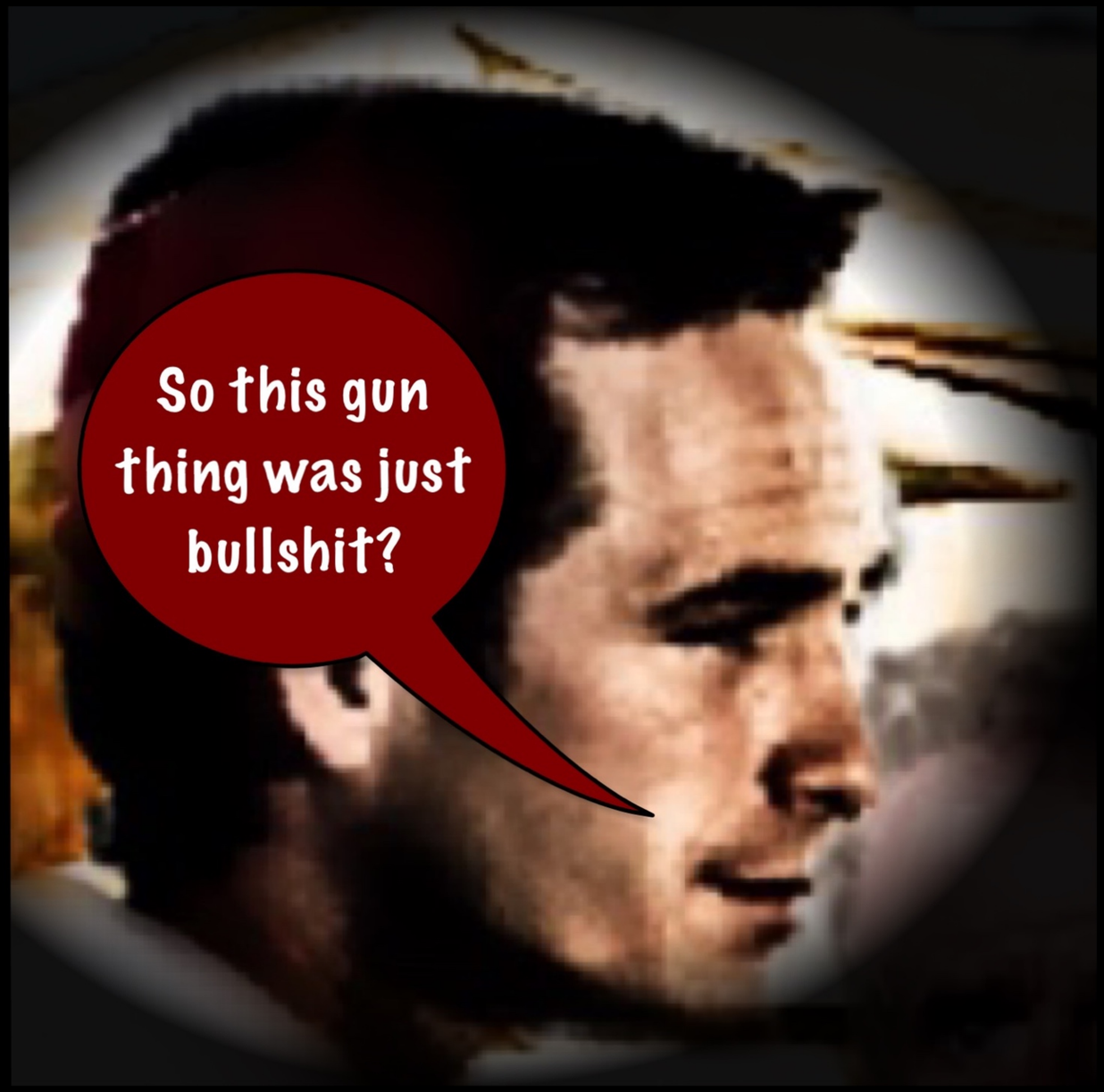



Take a little liquor drink for the heat?
No thanks. Let's step around back.

They go around back to a little tented area.




Gabby takes a shot of rum from his flask.
Why don't you use your head, Thax? Cut and run.
Can you help me out, or not?
I ain't helping you out any by giving you a gun.





Gabby enters a small shack.

He steps back out with a .45 automatic.



Gabby doesn't look happy as Thax takes the gun.







Thax checks the magazine. It's loaded. He checks the safety, then sticks it in his belt.

Later that night, Thax works his shell game.



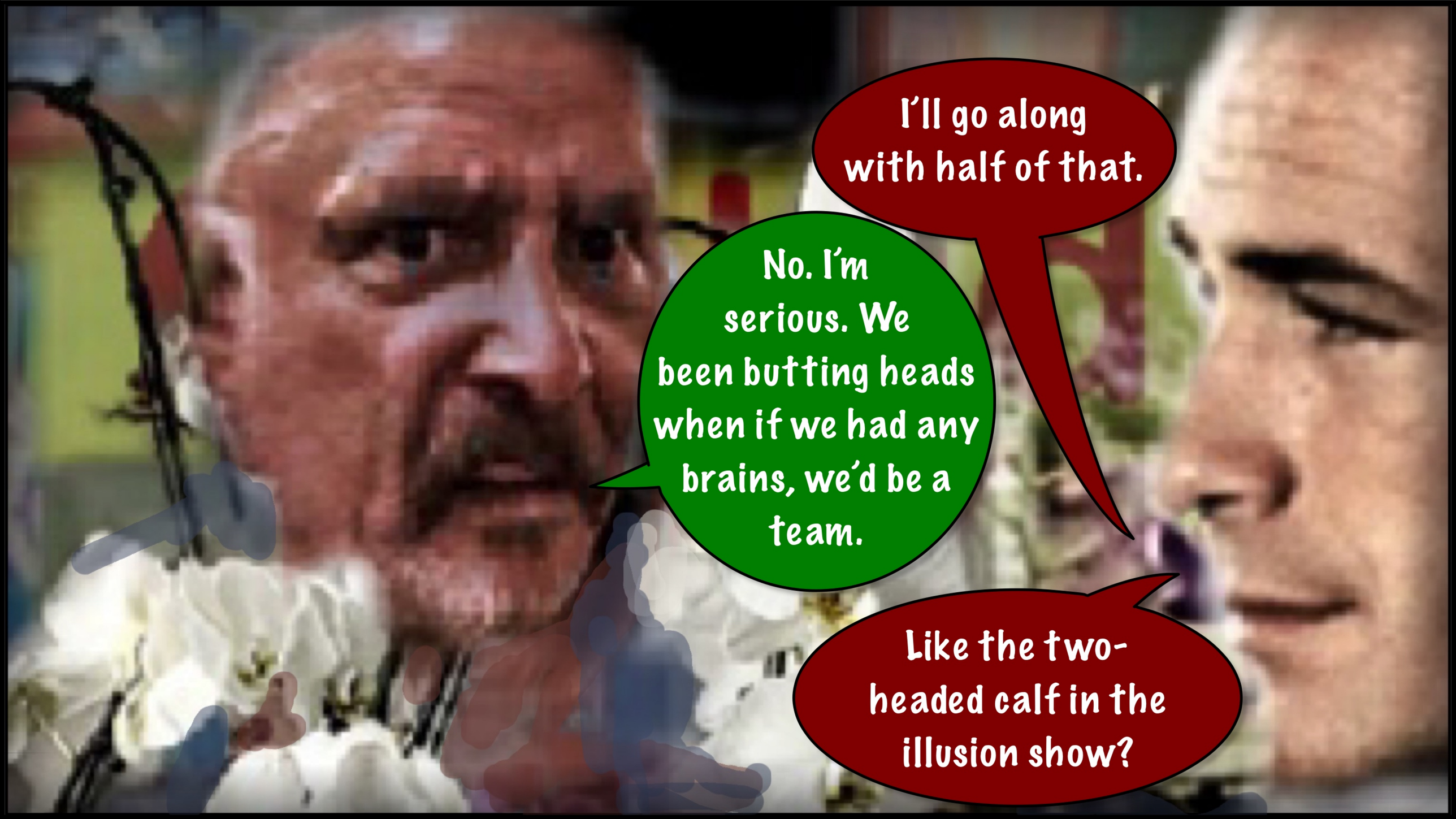


Across the way, Bill Duff gives him a peculiar stare.


Duff walks over.
Thax.
Bill.
You want an orchid?

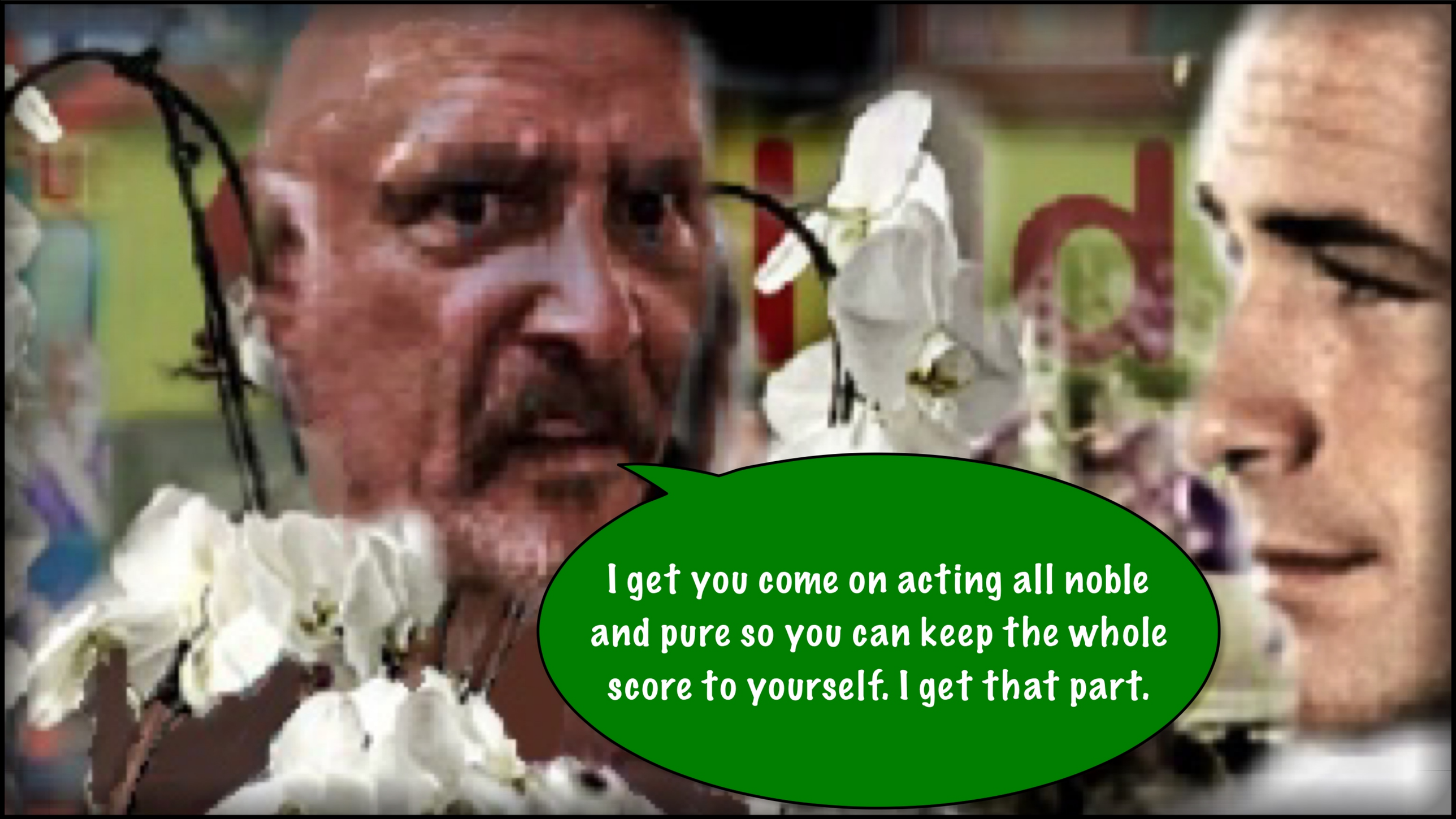
Duff ignores Thax's wisecrack and gets to the point.



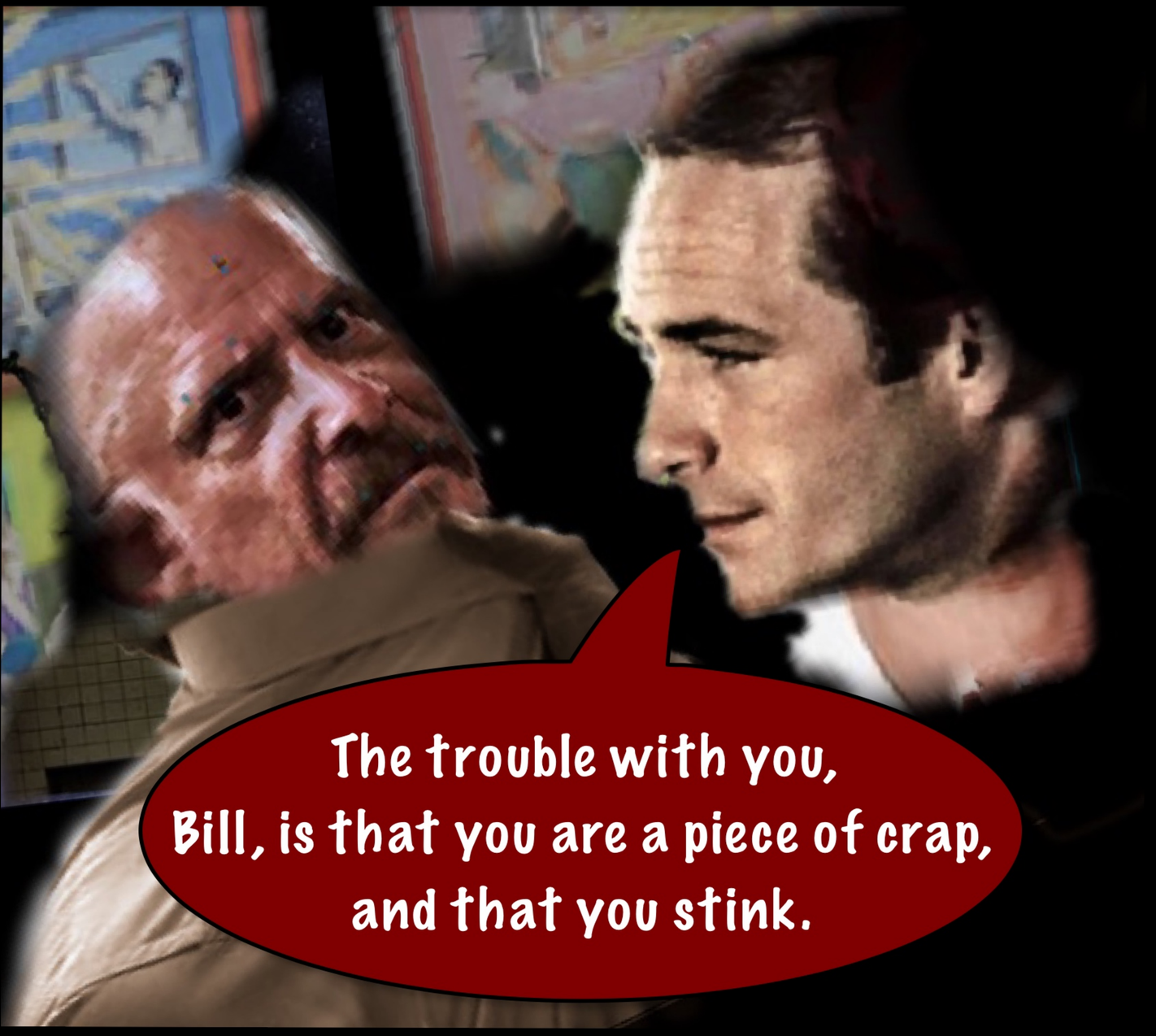

I'll go along with half of that.
No. I'm serious. We been butting heads when if we had any brains, we'd be a team.
Like the two-headed calf in the illusion show?


He gives Thax an aggrieved but patient look.
You know what I mean?
You mean you think you have a shot at laying your hands on someone else's money and I should help you.


Thax rotates the walnut shells.
You just don't get it, do you Bill?


I get you come on acting all noble and pure so you can keep the whole score to yourself. I get that part.

Thax grabs Duff's shirt and pulls him close.





The Viking horn MOANS, breaking the tension. Closing time.

Thax shoves Duff out into the midway where he collides with a tourist and falls on his ass.



Later, back at Tarzan's Treehouse...



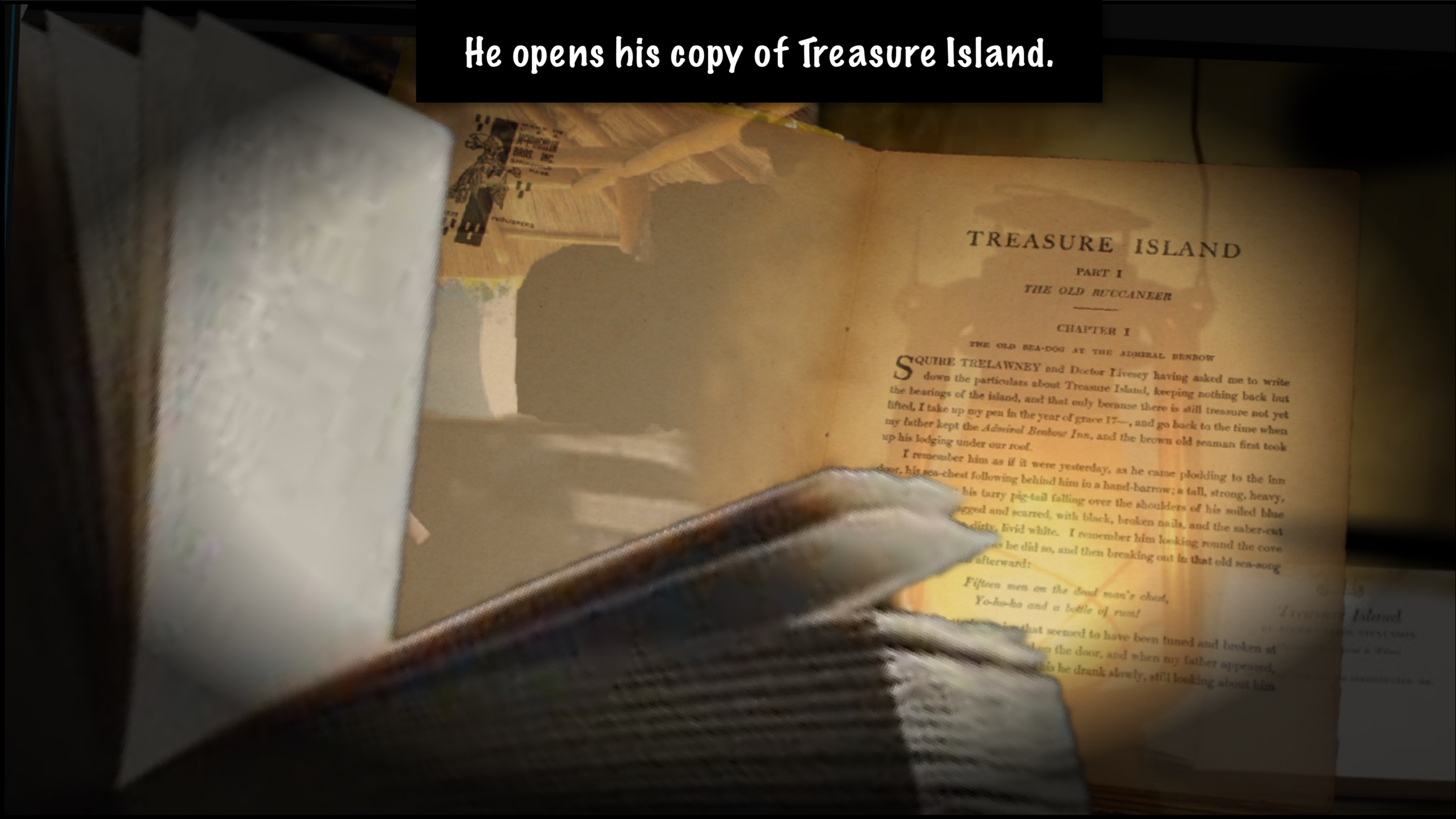


Thax pulls out the cardboard box he keeps his shirts in.


A little piece of paper is pinned to the top shirt.


He unpins it, holds it up and sees a black spot on the paper.
"But what is the black spot, captain?"

He opens his copy of Treasure Island.





Thax thumbs through the pages and finds the quote.

"But what is the black spot, captain?" I asked.

"That's a summons, mate. I'll tell you if they


He reads from the page.
"That's a summons, mate."
Thax closes the book.


He slips the .45 in his belt.
Nobody ever got the best of Long John Silver, not even Ben Gunn.


Thax rows to the Hispaniola.


He climbs aboard.


The cabin door flies open.
Hey, Thax! I've been expecting you.


Thax holds out the black spot, makes a stab at a quote.
"Look here. This ain't lucky. You've gone and cut a bible. What fool has cut a bible?"


Mike laughs, takes the black spot from Thax.
It really was cut from a bible, Thax. I always keep one around for laughs.
Private
Do Not Enter
Mike gestures him in.


Thax scans the cabin suspiciously as he enters.
TREASURE
ISLAND
R. L.
STEVENSON

He sees a closet, lodged in the corner, faced with two louvered doors.

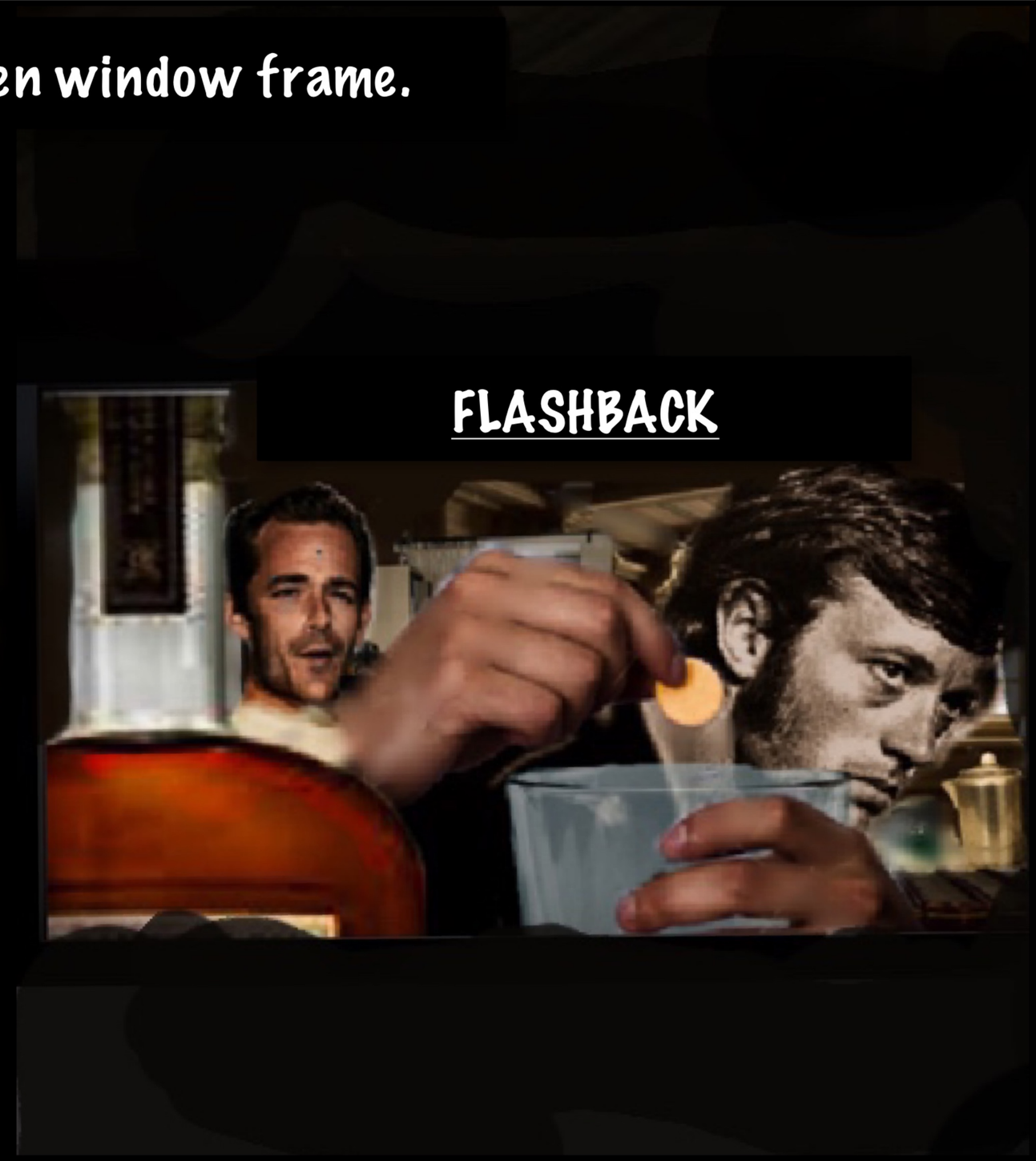


One door shifts slightly as he passes.

He sits in an open window frame.



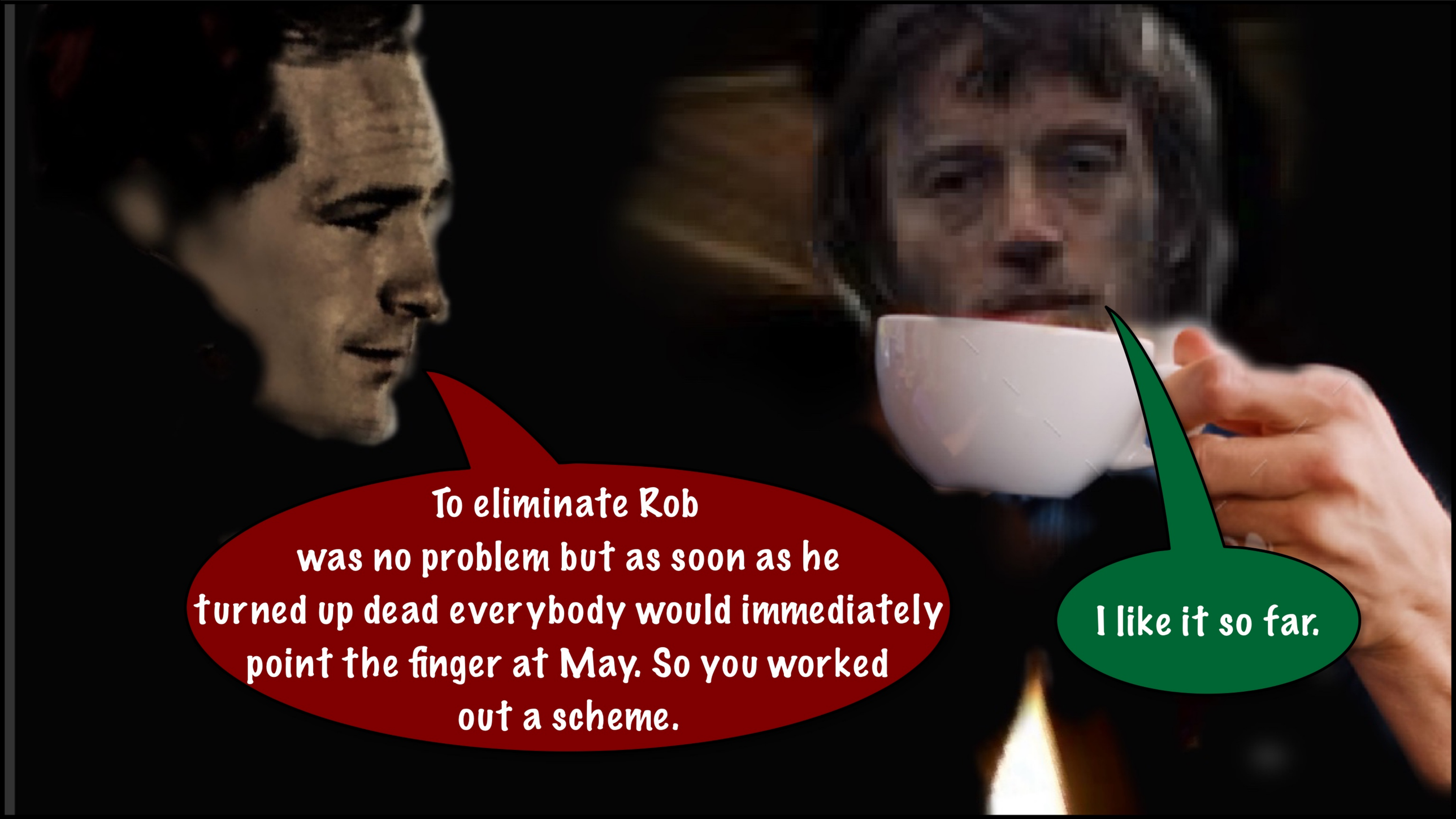
FLASHBACK

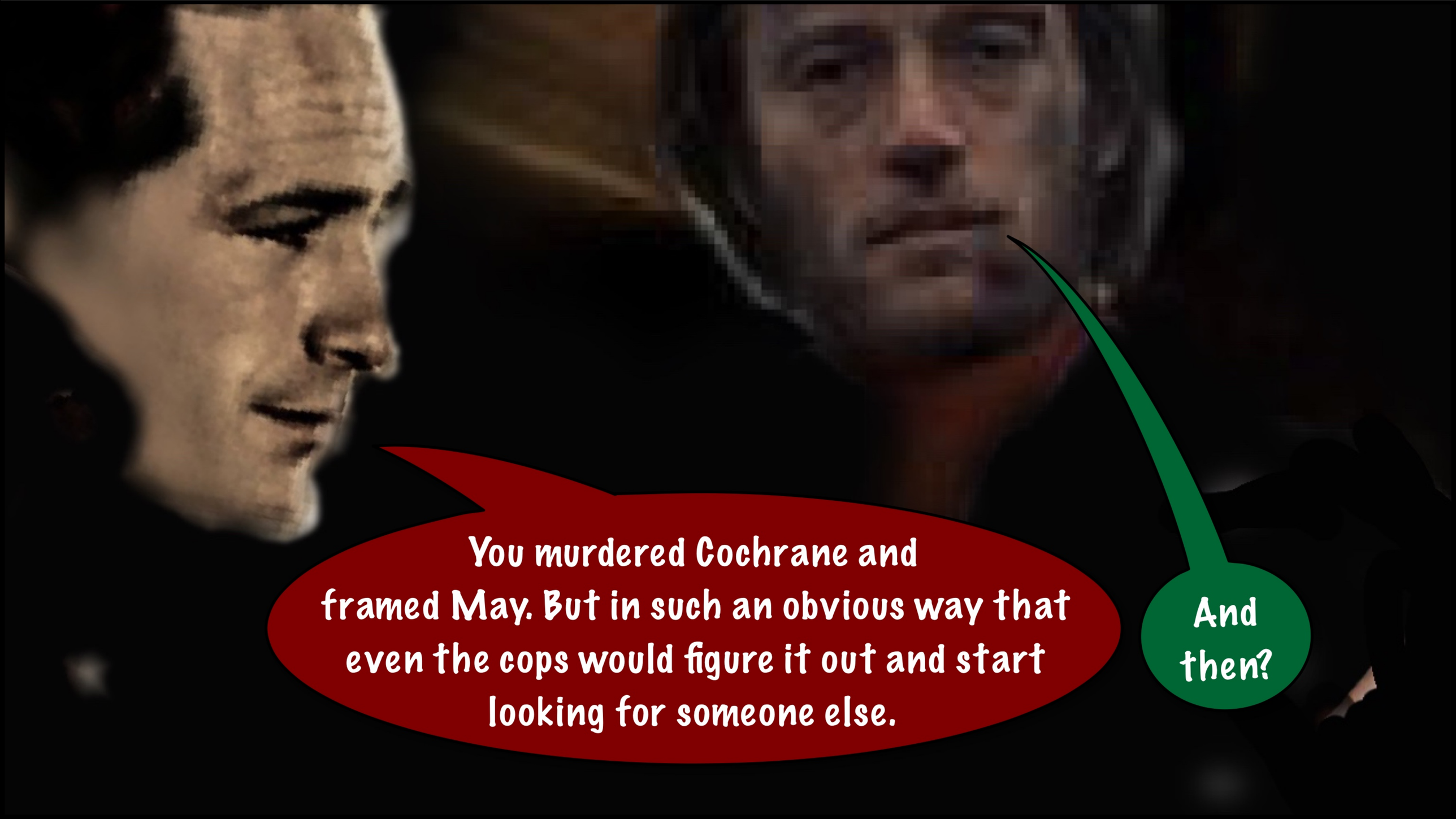



I'm going to have some coffee. You?


No? Well now,
why would I want to put
anything in your drink?
Because I bunked with
Terry Orme and because you
paid him a visit that night.


You can tell a story better than that, Thax. You shouldn't start in the middle you know, that's cheating.
All right. I'll back up to the beginning. You fell for May-or-May and her husband's dough.


To eliminate Rob was no problem but as soon as he turned up dead everybody would immediately point the finger at May. So you worked out a scheme.
I like it so far.


You murdered Cochrane and framed May. But in such an obvious way that even the cops would figure it out and start looking for someone else.
And then?


Then a midget walked in, asking for money.
You kind of cued up the midget too.
So you doped me.


Sodium Amytal.
And killed poor Terry.
They say it leaves a fairly clean head.


Which brings us to bull's-eye.
Who's that?
Maybe May didn't tell you.


What about it, May?

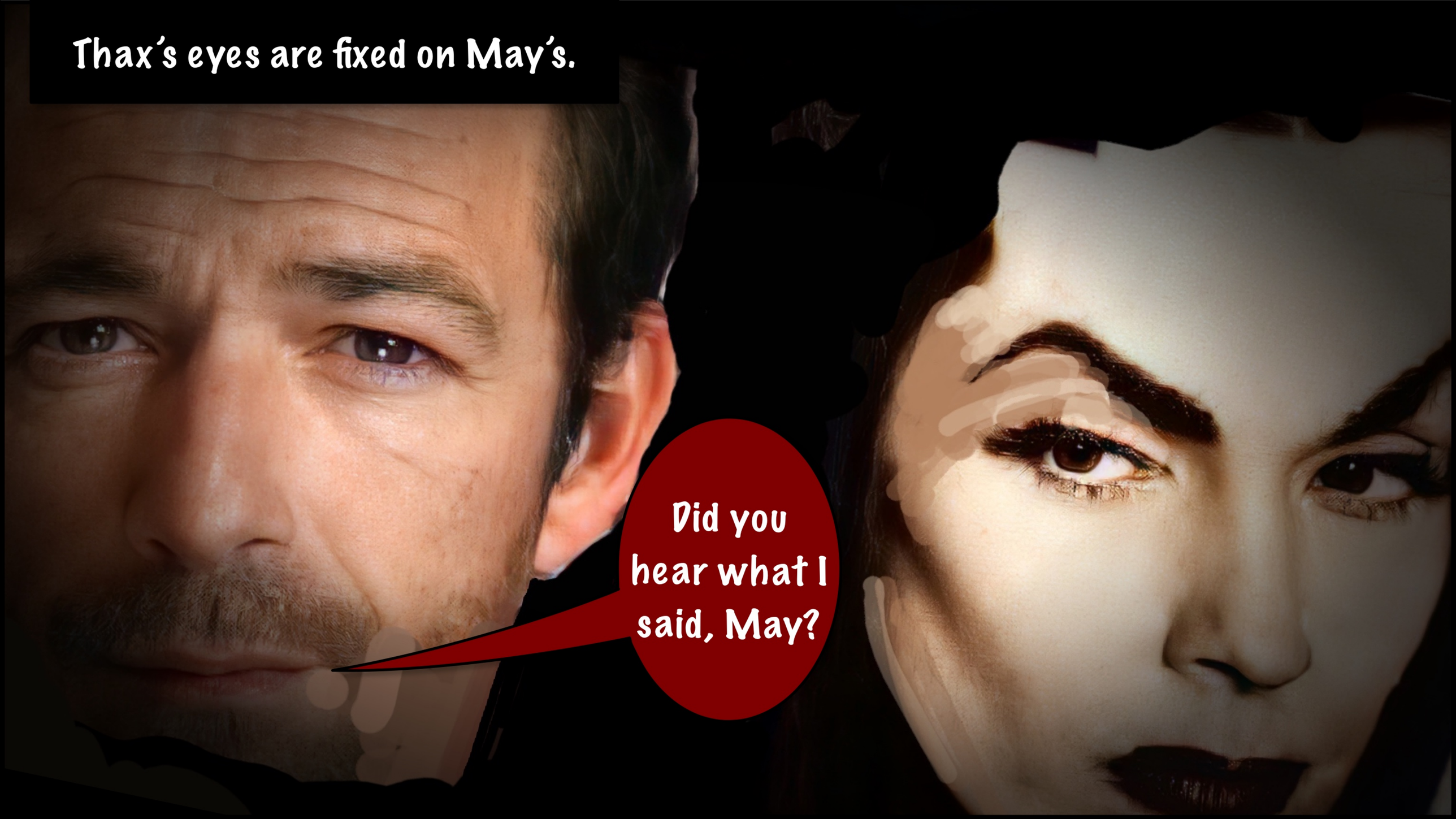
The louvered doors swing open and May steps out, gripping one of her knives.




She turns to Mike.
He's got this attitude, thinks he's better than everyone else.


Better drop the knife, May.


You wouldn't really kill us would you, Thax?
Afraid you'd leave a bloodstain on your precious, almighty, goddamned soul.


Thax's eyes are fixed on May's.
Did you hear what I said, May?

She raises the knife, about to throw it, when...

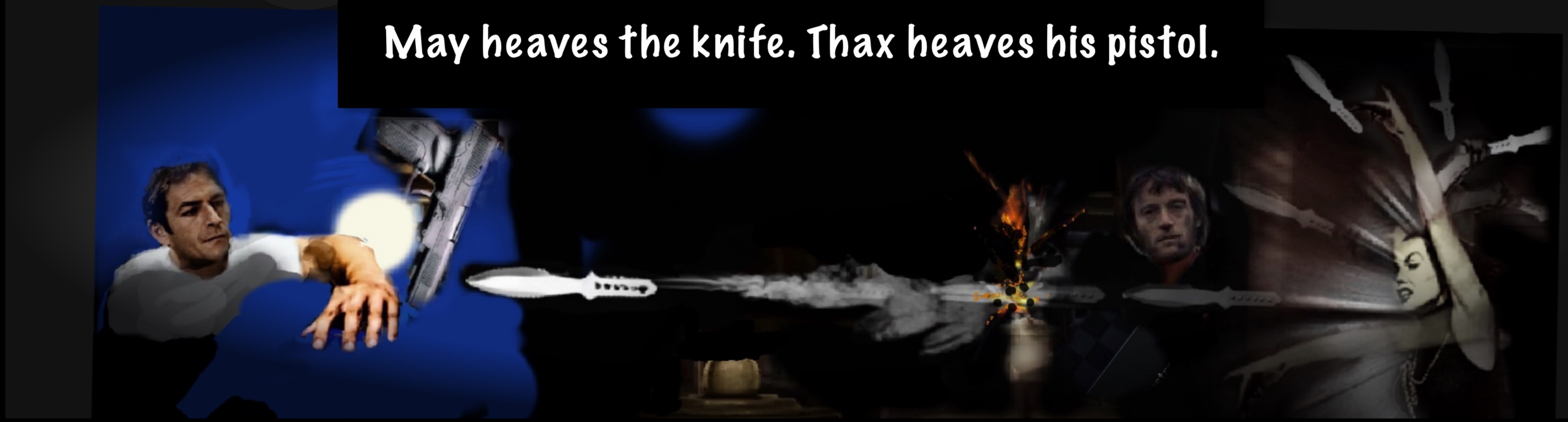


Thax pulls the trigger.



Mike grins.

May heaves the knife. Thax heaves his pistol.

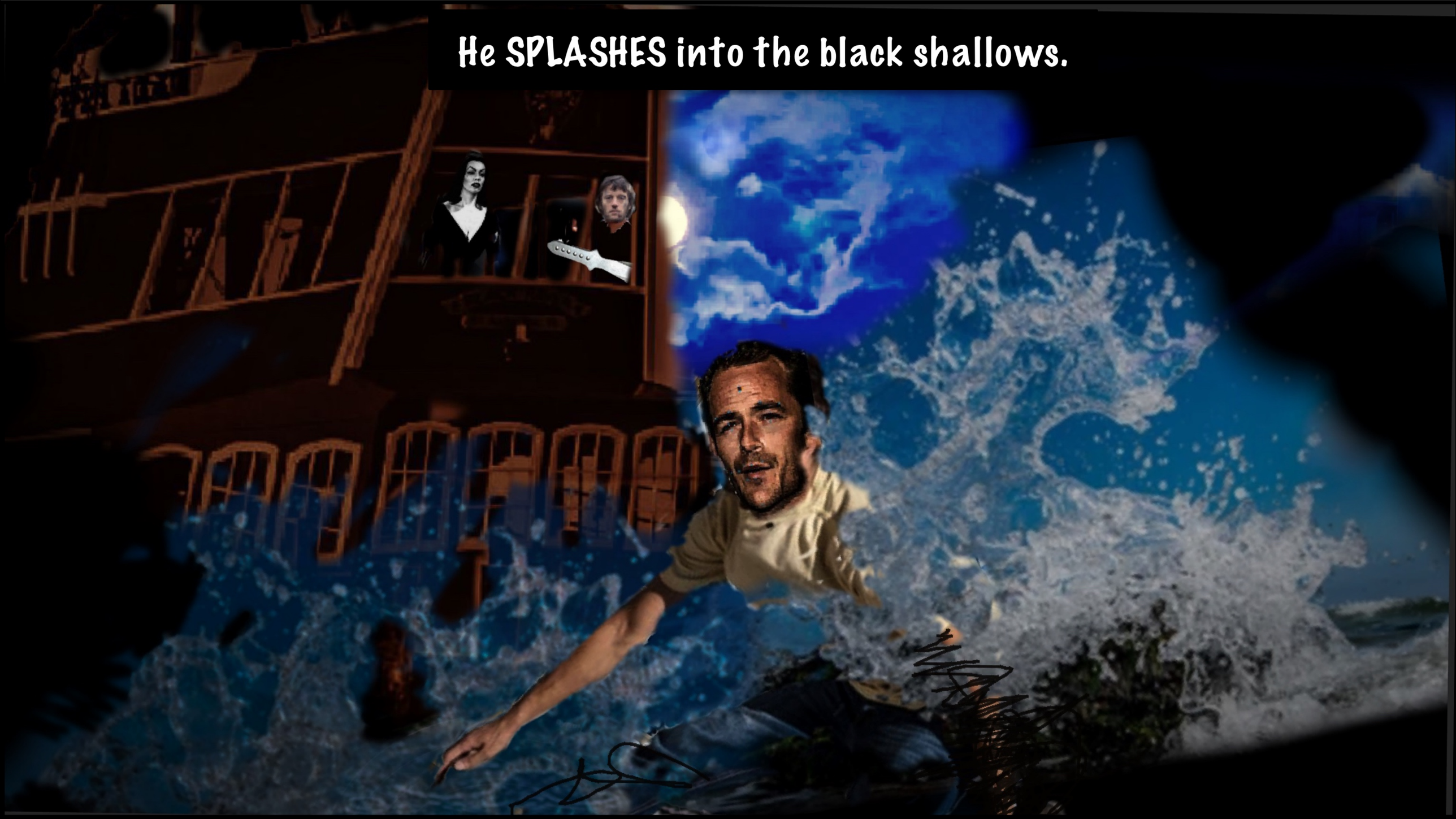




The knife sticks in the sternpost.


Thax goes backwards...


...out the window.


He SPLASHES into the black shallows.

Mike stands at the window working the knife free.





Thax slogs to shore, heading for cover.

Moving fast, he stumbles into a catclaw thicket.




Thax struggles to find an opening.
His hand touches something alive.


Thax springs back and crouches.
A long silence, then...


A SHRILL CRY! Thax jumps.


Mike leaps forward, missing Thax who whirls to track him then crouches again.
They wait, silence.

Thax feels the ground, groping for a weapon and settles for a handful of dirt.



A BRIGHT FLASH OF LIGHT!





Thax is blinded until his eyes adjust.


He sees Mike, standing six feet away,
who quotes from Treasure Island.
"Jim, I reckon we're fouled you and
me and we'll have to sign articles."


Mike cuts the light and pounces.


Thax chucks his handful of dirt in Mike's face then ducks.



Mike flies over him.

Thax is up and going. Mike crashes through the underbrush.





Thax breaks through an opening and starts running.



Mike scrambles behind him.



Thax slams into a tree. THUD!


Mike runs past him, missing the tree.
Then a GASP!

UUUAAH!

Finally, a guttural CRY!


Thax takes a cautious step forward.
A black hole looms in the darkness below.

He climbs down into Flint's Treasure pit.




Mike Ransome is there too, face down.
Flint's
ASURE
Walrus


Thax rolls him over.

He pries the lighter from
Mike's fist, and strikes it.




The light sparks in Mike's vacant eyes, staring somewhere far away.


May's knife is stuck in his heart.



Back in the cabin, May paces through a gray garland of cigarette smoke.



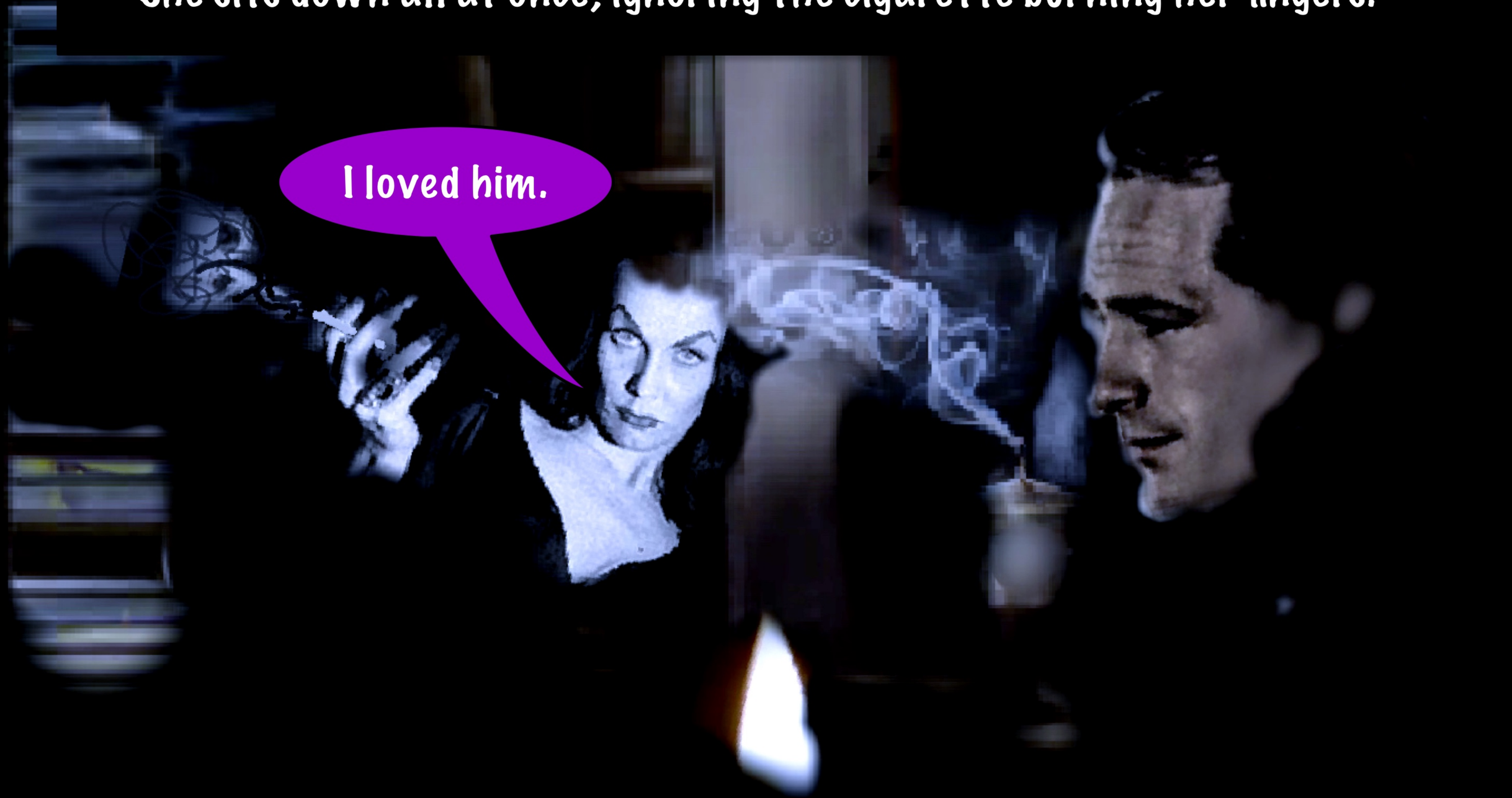
When Thax opens the cabin door, she comes to an abrupt stop.




He's dead, May. He fell on your knife.
You filthy bastard.


I wouldn't lie to you now, May. It was an accident.

She sits down all at once, ignoring the cigarette burning her fingers.



Thax picks up Gabby's pistol.

He shoves it into his belt.




Why did you have to come here?
Coincidence, May.
What are you going to do?
Tell Ferris.
He won't believe you.
I think he will.





She drops the cigarette.

Thax closes the cabin door quietly behind him.

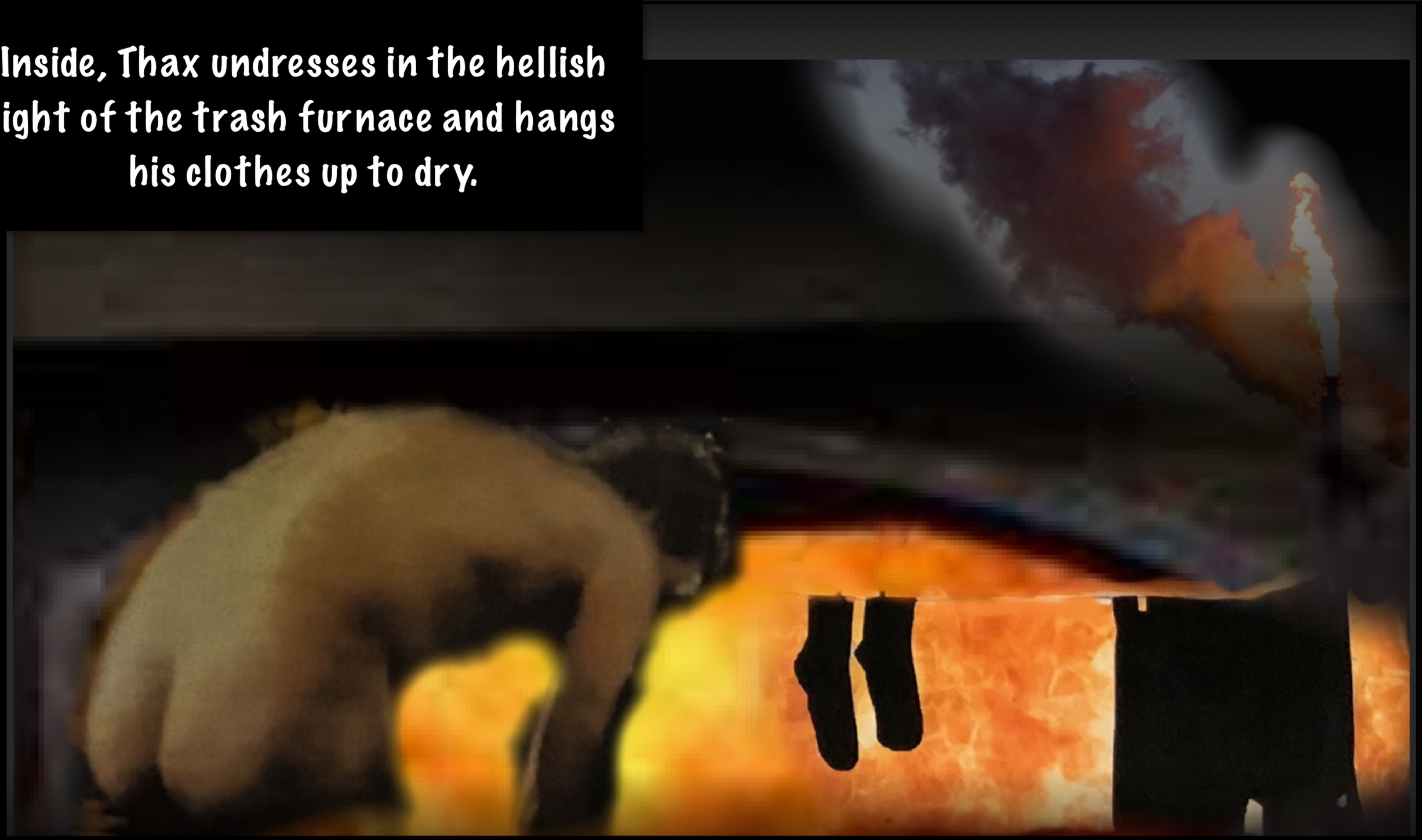



He leaves May alone in the darkness.


He rows back to the dock. The moon comes out from behind the clouds.


At the Dreamland power plant, smoke pours from the chimney stacks.

Inside, Thax undresses in the hellish light of the trash furnace and hangs his clothes up to dry.





In the bunkhouse, a few drunks are snoring, sleeping it off in the darkness.

CLICK! Thax turns on the light.





He picks up the pay phone, feeds it, dials.


Hello.
25
1957

Ferris is on the phone with Thax.





Ferris' partner Iturbi is in bed with him.




She can't swim.


Did it ever occur to you she might commit suicide?
She won't.


Thaxton! I'll be out there as quick as I can find my pants and a squad car. You stay put. Hear me? You and I are going to have a long talk.


I've still got a couple of things to take care of.



Thax hangs up.

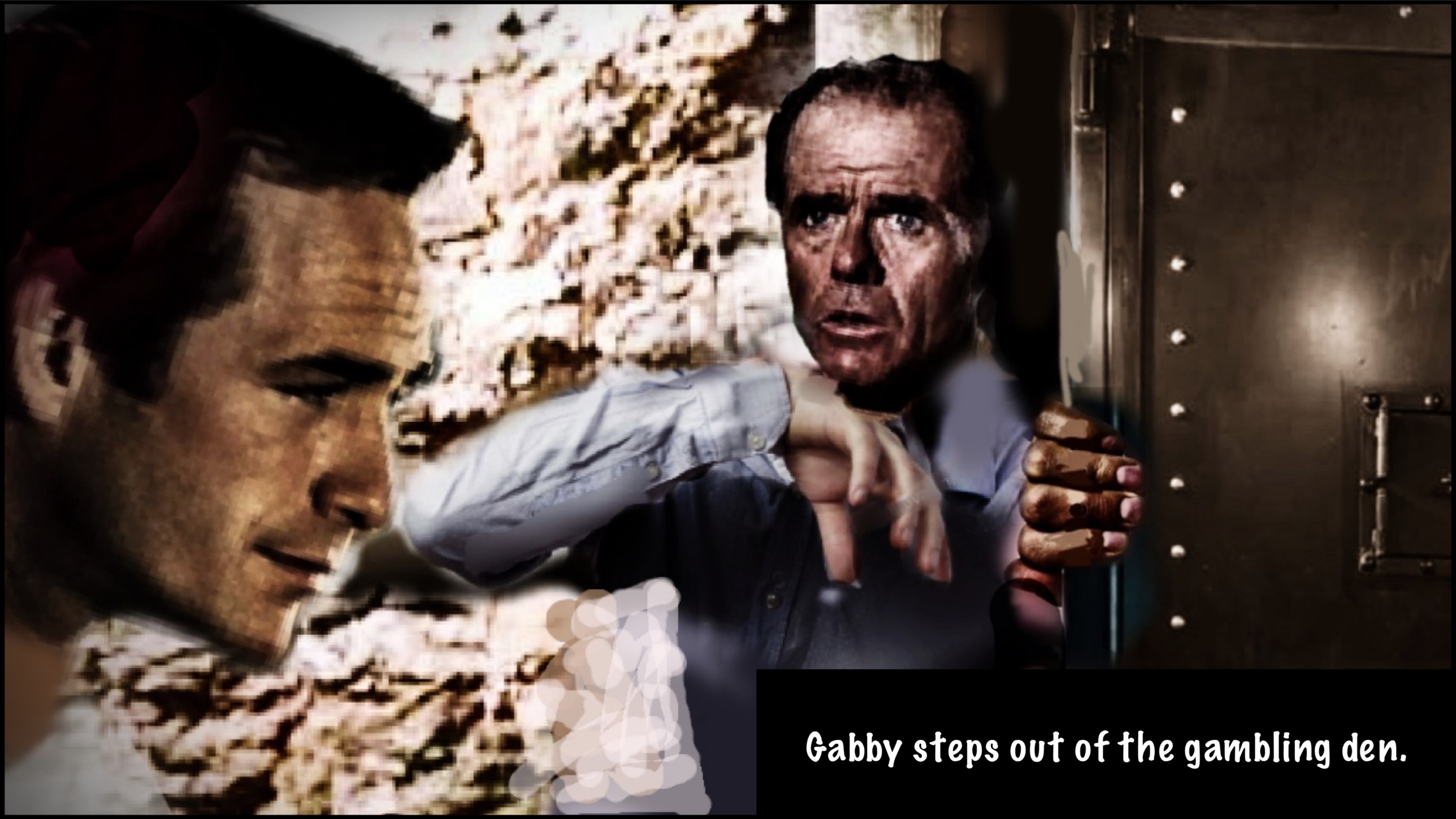
One of the bunkhouse drunks wakes up.



Thax walks over and slaps him hard. The man passes out.

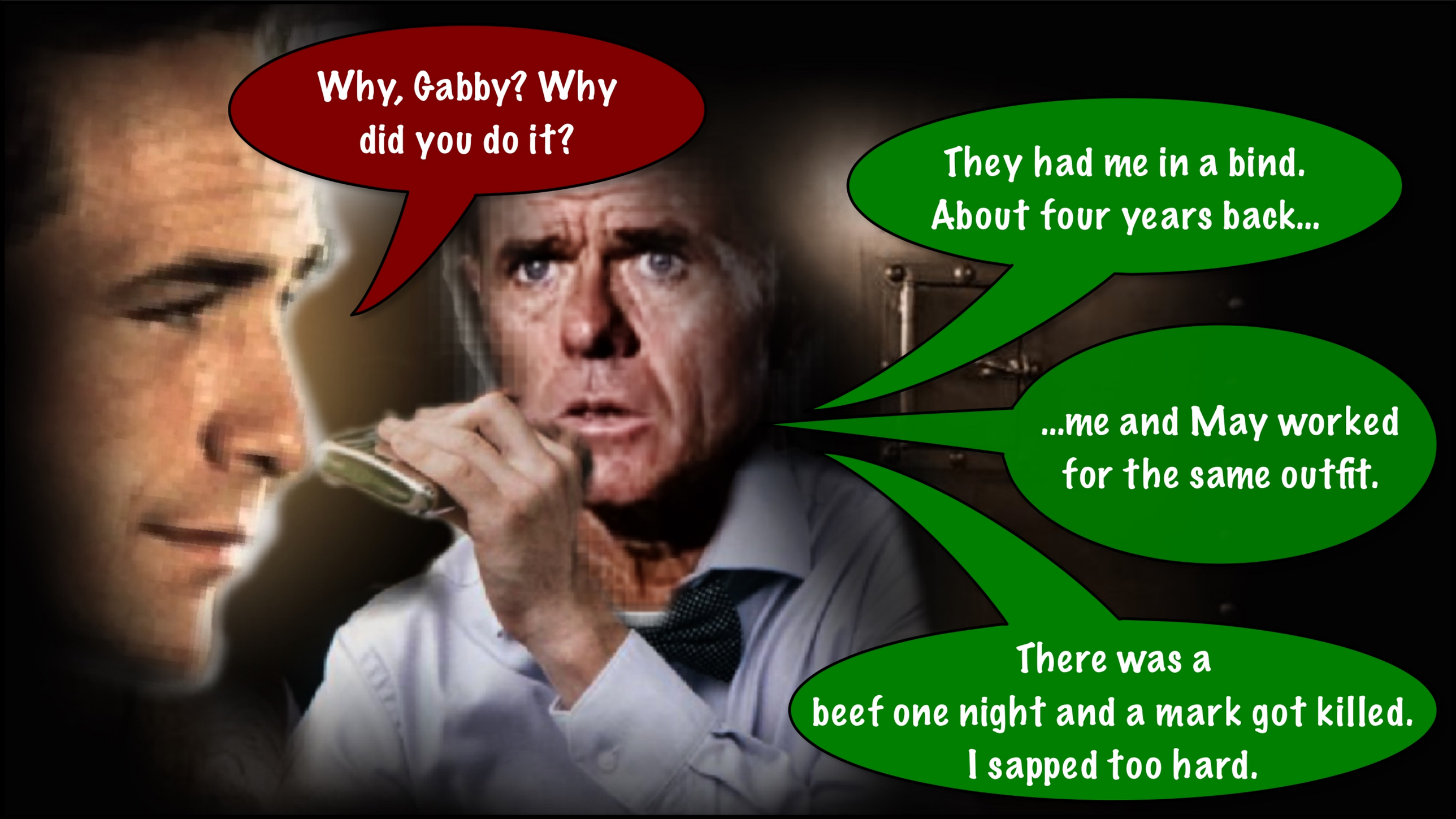



Dracula's Castle basement.
NO SMOKING
Thax descends the stairs.


Gabby steps out of the gambling den.


Thax hands him the forty-five.
You better replace the firing pin.
Are they dead?


Mike is, and the cops are coming for May.
Forgive me, Thax.


Why, Gabby? Why did you do it?
They had me in a bind. About four years back...
...me and May worked for the same outfit.
There was a beef one night and a mark got killed. I sapped too hard.


A few of the carnies knew I did it but they figured he had it coming.
May was one of them.


Who told them I was looking for a gun?
Mike did.
He figured you'd come to me, said it was all part of a big joke they was gonna pull on you and I better play along or else.


But I tried to warn you off, didn't I?
That's right Gabby, you tried.


He turns away...
It doesn't matter now.
...and climbs the twisted stairs.



Thax enters Dracula's bedroom.

He throws himself on the bed.



His eyes close to the sounds of WAILING SIRENS below.


He dreams.






THE BIG




Thax. Thax...


Billie stands over him, holding a suitcase.
Wake up Thax.


He opens his eyes. Daylight.

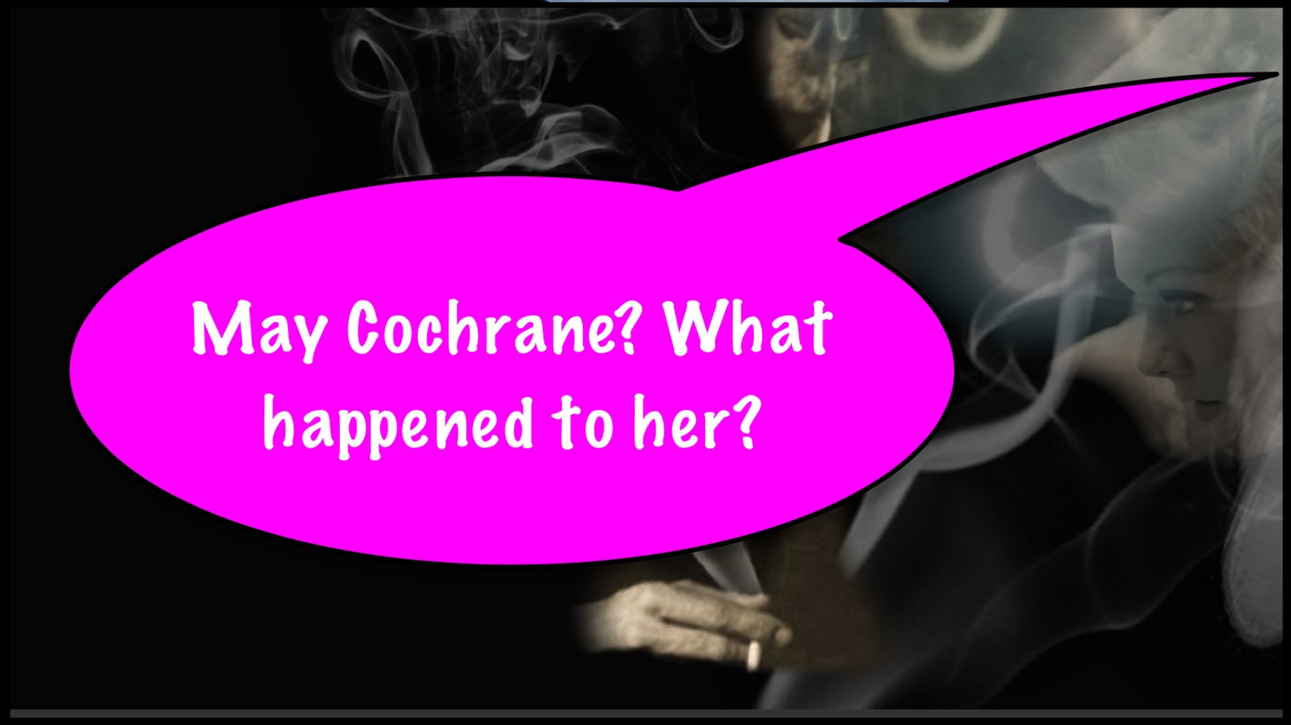

Thax, I've been looking everywhere for you! And so have the police.
How long have you been up here?


What time is it.
It's nearly nine. Thax, there's police all over the place.
Do you have a cigarette?
She sits down on the bed, gives him one from her purse.

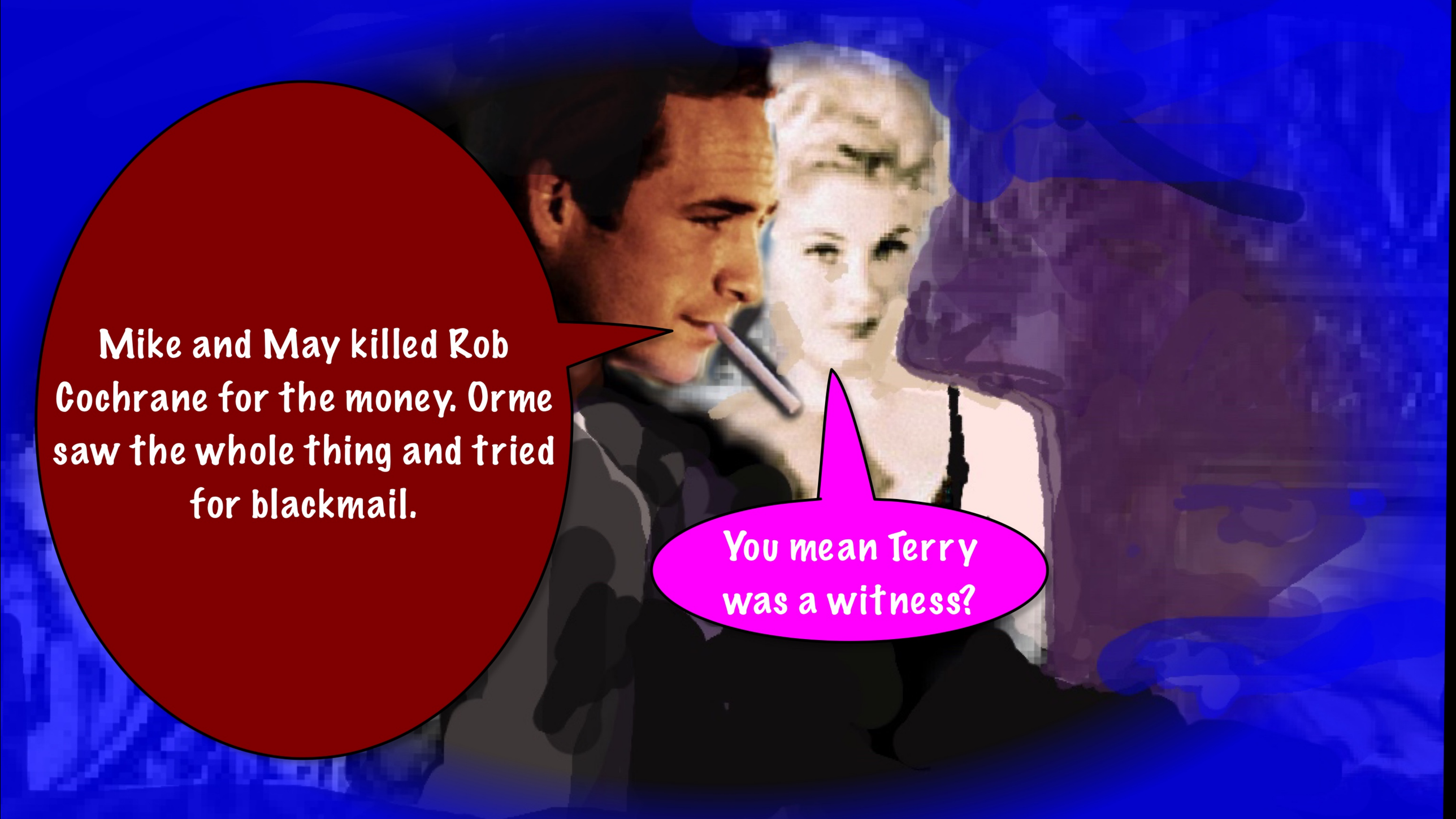

Thax, they're saying Mike Ransome was killed last night.
That's right, he had an accident and fell on one of May's knives.






May Cochrane? What happened to her?


She's still alive, as far as I know.
I don't understand, honey. What...
Billie makes an impatient little shake with her head.


Mike and May killed Rob Cochrane for the money. Orme saw the whole thing and tried for blackmail.
You mean Terry was a witness?


That's right, Billie, but you knew that.


That isn't funny, Thax.


People always say that, but it's bullshit.



He reaches in his pocket and pulls out the envelope from Lloyd Franks' safe.



He hands it to her.



She puts it in her purse.


Terry knew about May and Mike shacking up, and he saw Mike dump Cochrane in the swamp.

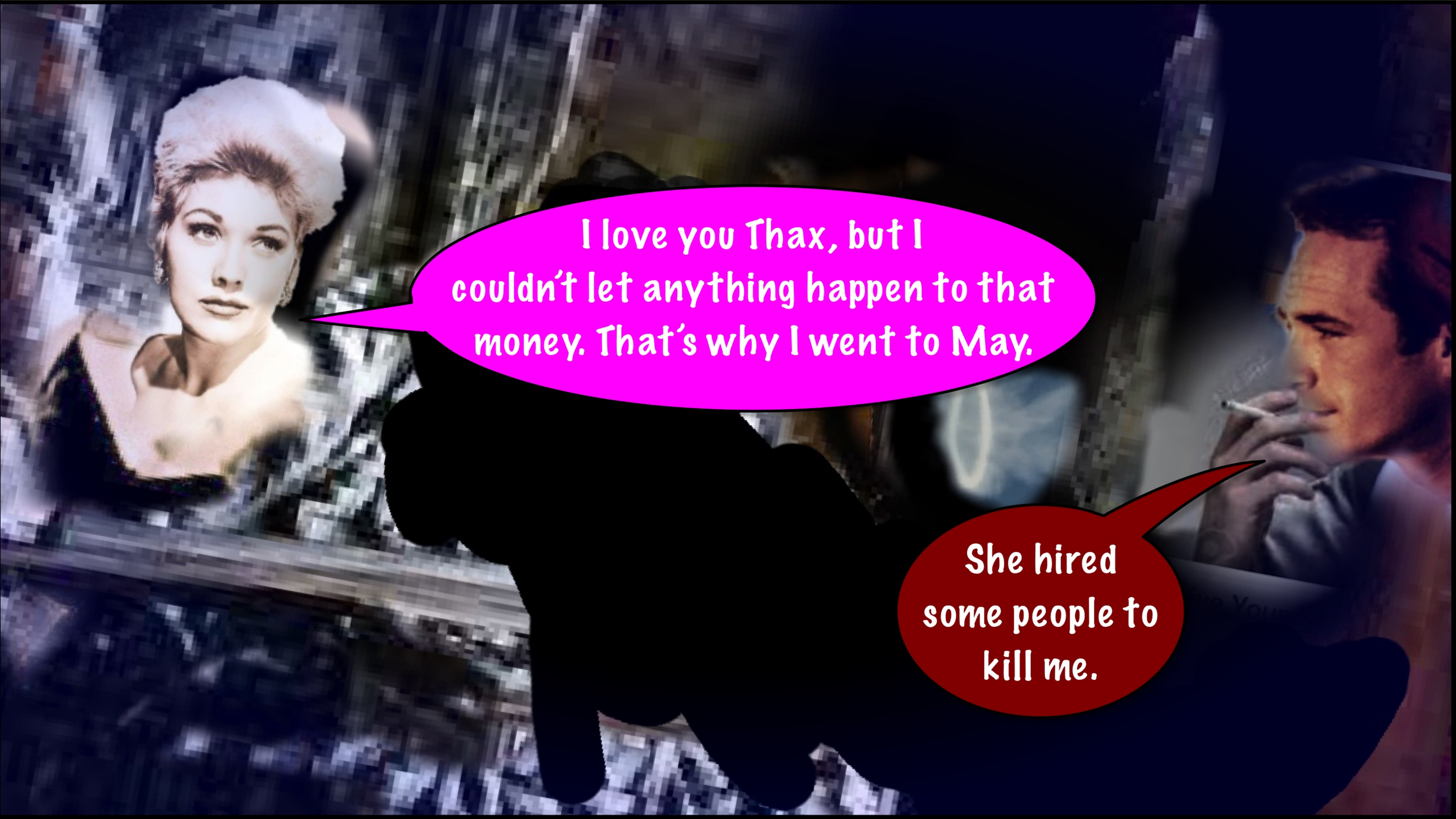

But he needed someone he trusted to deal with the practical side of things.
Someone like you.


Billie drops her act and comes to the point.
I have five hundred thousand dollars, Thax.
Cash?


That's right, darling. We can leave any time.

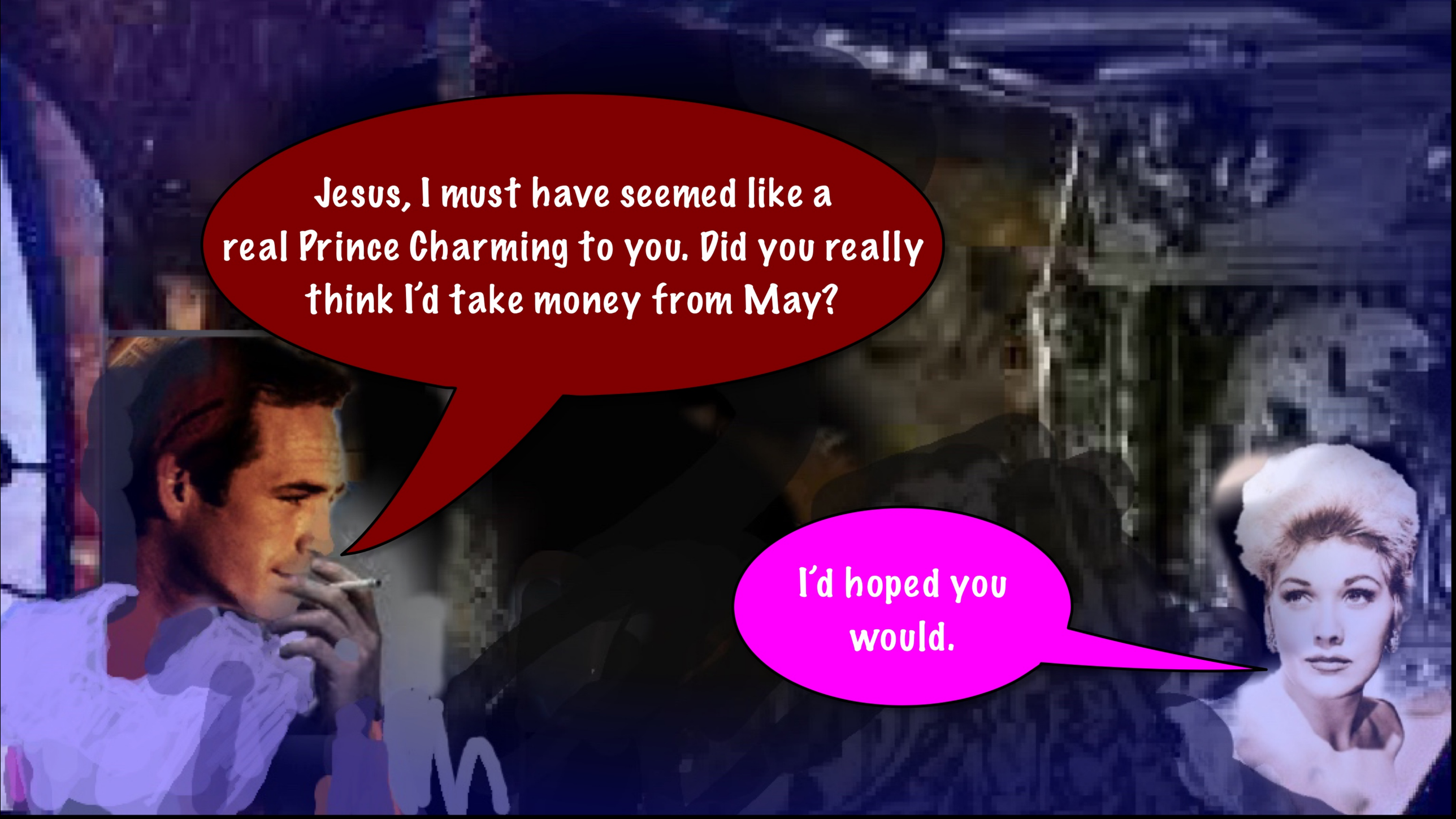

Leave?


We're clean. No one has anything on us. We didn't murder anyone.
Billie, May didn't know I was on to her and Ransome until someone told her.


I love you Thax, but I couldn't let anything happen to that money. That's why I went to May.
She hired some people to kill me.



Her voice trails off. Her eyes go moist.


Jesus, I must have seemed like a real Prince Charming to you. Did you really think I'd take money from May?
I'd hoped you would.

Thax walks to the window and looks down at Dreamland.





Three or four cops scurry about below.

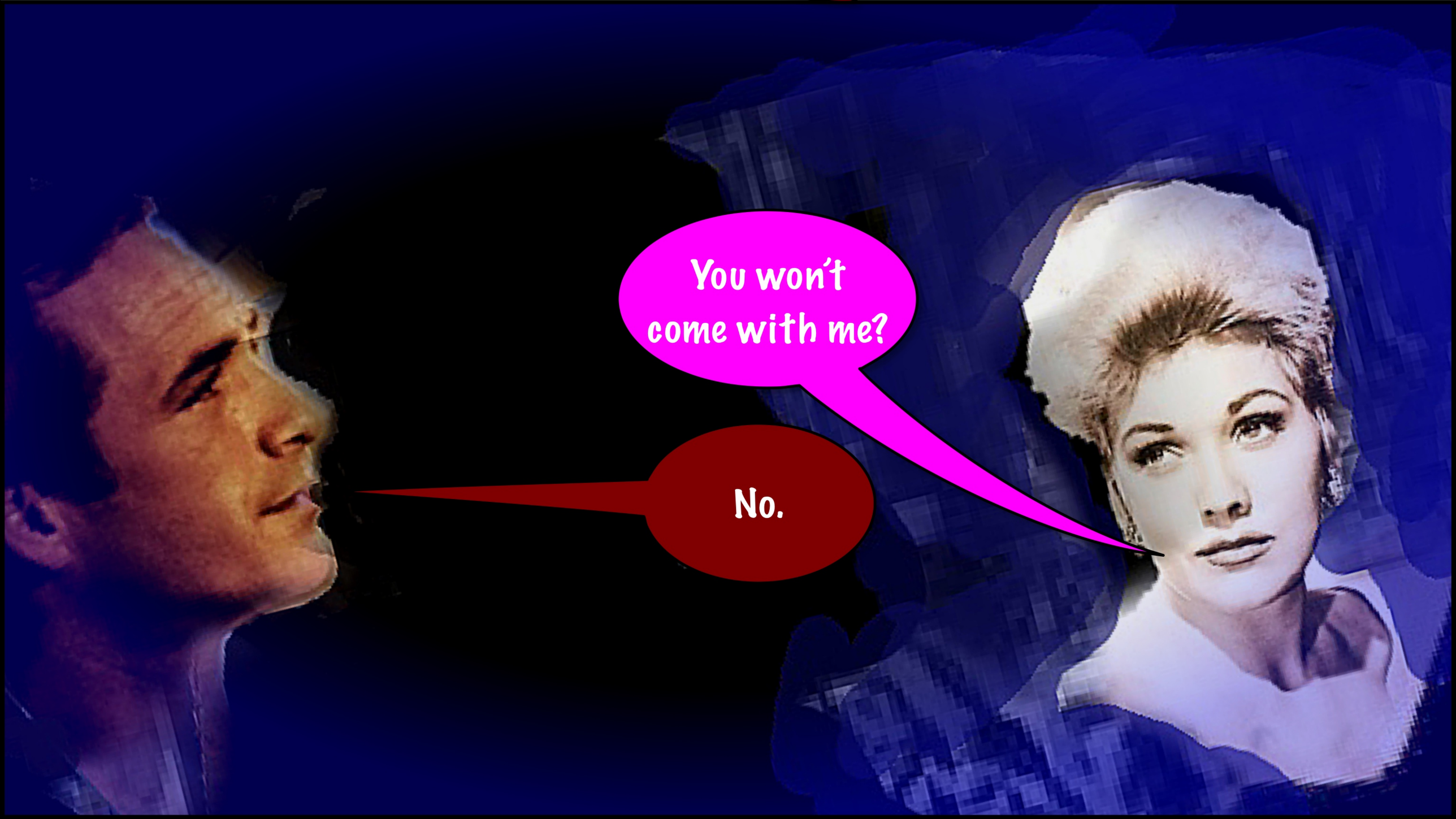
She picks up her suitcase.



Thax turns back to her. He looks dead.




You'd better take your money and run with it, just as fast and far as you can go.
And if you're lucky...
...maybe you'll even reach the Mediterranean.


You won't come with me?
No.



Down below, the cops take
May away in handcuffs.



He turns back to the window.





She stands, glaring at Thax. Then she seems to surrender, to relax.



Here, you'll need these.

She reaches in her purse, brings out a pack of cigarettes and some matches, tosses them on the bed.



Thanks.

She turns and picks up her suitcase.



Thax is left alone.


The sound of her heels go click-clacking down the stairs.
CLICK!
CLACK!
CLICK!
CLACK!
UNDER

Thax walks out into the bright strength of a new day.





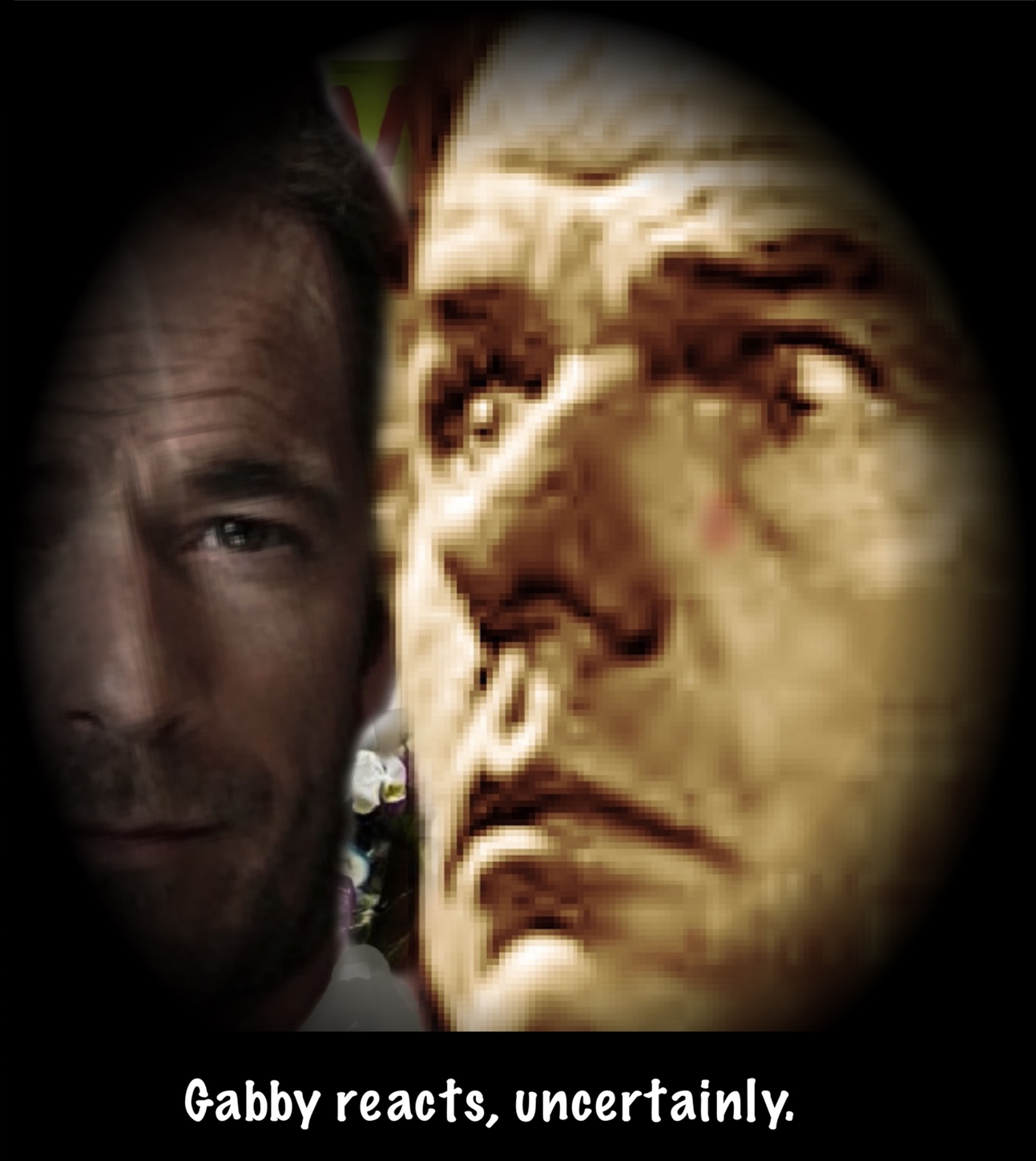



The first influx of marks wander onto the lot.

Gabby spots Thax. A look of shame crosses his face.



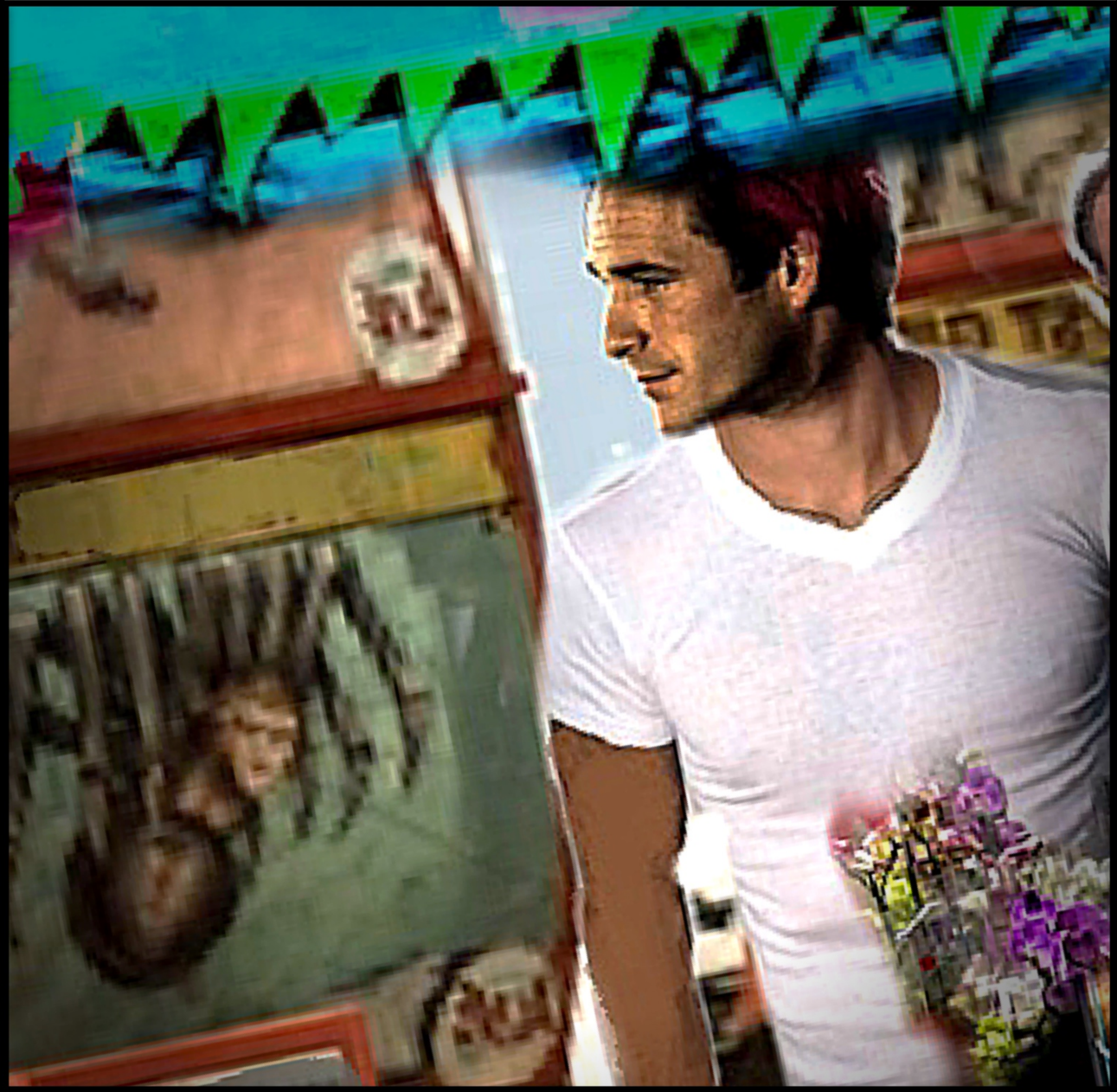

Thax waves at Gabby.


Gabby reacts, uncertainly.

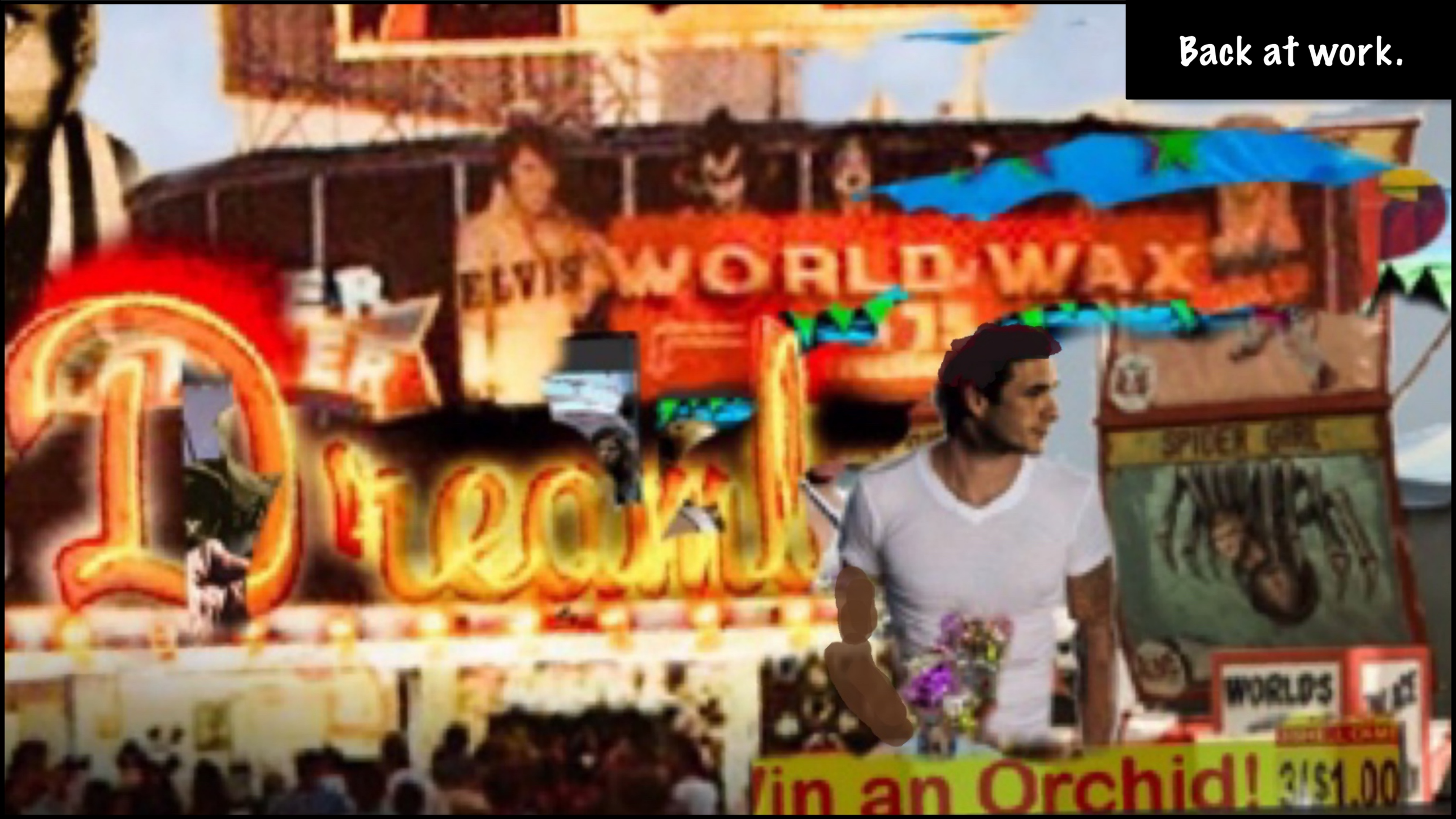
Bill Duff is on his bally, spieling.



He spots Thax.



They exchange a blank glance.


Back at work.
ELVIS
WORLD WAX
Dream
SPIDER GIRL
WORLDS
in an Orchid!
3/$1.00


Thax spots Ferris and Iturbi at the far end of the midway.


They march purposefully toward him in lockstep.
3/$1.00
Find The Pea
3 SHELL GAME


Thax makes a slow pass, right-over-left, and hides the pea.


ELL GAME
GAME SHELL
And here they go again, ladies and gentlemen.
So simple, yet so mysterious.


If you spot the pea, you'll win an orchid...
...and live a perfect life.


Miss the pea, well, you get a chance to try again.


And it's
only a dollar.


THE END

CREDITS

Written and Directed by John McNaughton

Illustrated by Tony Byrnes

Adapted from the novel by Robert Edmond Alter

Additional dialogue by Ted Mann
Book design by Dmitry Samarov
Executive Producer Steven A. Jones
Technical Administrator Robert Brandel
Printed by McNaughton & Gunn



SPECIAL THANKS

Elke Titus
Jack Byrne
Scott Yoselow
J-nett Jones

I met JM downstate at the University of Illinois in the late sixties. We were enrolled in the University's Fine Art College, and we co-created art projects including sculptures and short films. One of our first student projects together was "Happy Pig," a short underground experimental film we shot on a wind-up 16mm Bolex camera. That film disappeared after its premier showing at a house party one wild evening, 50 plus years ago. But other projects we worked on together in art-college included "destructo-mania" which originated around a self-destructing kinetic sculpture on display in the halls of the Krannert Fine Arts Building. The heroic sculpture was about 10 feet tall, made from plaster, wood, wire, and an old washing machine motor. Once plugged in, the sculpture, which resembled Rodin's "The Thinker," shook and trembled until it all fell apart, all set to flashing lights, smoke bombs and music furnished by our hard rock musician friends.

After art college, our collaboration extended to a folio of haunting black & white photographs that John shot on site, inside, of the shuttered state prison in Joliet, Illinois. We used those photos to pitch a documentary film to the local PBS station. That project did not get off the ground, and worse, I misplaced the negatives. A terrible loss that buggers me to this day. Not long after that I plotted my life away from a career in "art."

Many years later, JM approached me to help him conceptualize a graphic novel, "Carny Kill, " based on the noir thriller novel by Jonathan Edmond Alter. Thus I re-entered the art world. Here was my chance to rectify my karmic debt owed JM for the loss of his negatives. Today, I am happy to proffer this artistic endeavor to square things up with my artist collaborator friend.

With his years of experience in cinema, JM sought to tell the story through a progression of still images which I provided. The many draft compositions surrounding each scene in Carny Kill can be shown upon request.



Tony Byrnes


CARNY
KILL


Dream Land
ILLUSIONS